

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION

May  
2007

# ANIMATION

AGAZINE

TM



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Have a Bright Future?**

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# BREAKTHROUGH'S (BEHIND THE SCENES) ANIMATION ADVENTURES

BLEEP!  
BLEEP!

CALM YOURSELF!

MY MOTHER SAID  
THERE'D BE  
DAYS LIKE THIS.

KEEP QUIET OUT THERE!  
DON'T YOU KNOW WE  
HAVE A CO-PRODUCTION  
GOING ON HERE!

CUT IT OUT YOU GUYS!

WE'VE GOT SHOWS TO STAR IN,  
AUDIENCES TO PLEASE, COUNTRIES  
TO CONQUER, AND  
MULTI-PLATFORMS TO EXPLORE!  
WE'RE LIVING THE DREAM,  
RIGHT CAPTAIN FLAMINGO?!

OH YEAH, I'M LIVING  
THE DREAM!

ATOMIC BETTY WE HAVE  
GRAVE NEWS, THERE ARE NEW  
SHOWS THAT HAVE BEEN  
RELEASED AND IN DEVELOPMENT  
THAT ARE SMART, WITTY,  
AND THE MUSIC ROCKS!  
FIND OUT WHO THESE  
NEW COMPETITORS ARE!

HA! NO WAY THEY'LL  
BE AS UNIQUE AS ME!  
HI YA!

CO-PRODUCTION!  
THAT'S WHAT  
MY EX AND I  
USED TO DO!



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Y-5 WHO'S BEHIND THESE NEW HOT SHOWS?

CAPTAIN, MY RESEARCH CONCLUDES THEY ARE BREAKTHROUGH ANIMATION SHOWS, THE SAME PRODUCTION COMPANY THAT PRODUCES OUR SHOW.

EXCUSE ME, EXCUSE ME?!

THAT'S RIGHT BIRDBRAIN. BREAKTHROUGH ENTERTAINMENT HAS US WELL POSITIONED TO SAVE THE WORLD, ONE KID AT A TIME.

WATCH IT ATOMIC GIRL! MY CAPTAIN PINK TIGHTS IS NO JOKE!

DID I GET THAT RIGHT MR. GILLIS?

(GULP?) THE "S" WORD?!!

DID SOMEBODY SAY SEX?

GOOD WORK ATOMIC BETTY - NOT ONLY HAVE YOU IDENTIFIED THE CULPRITS BUT IT APPEARS THEY ARE ON OUR SIDE. NOW PASS THE SUNSCREEN!

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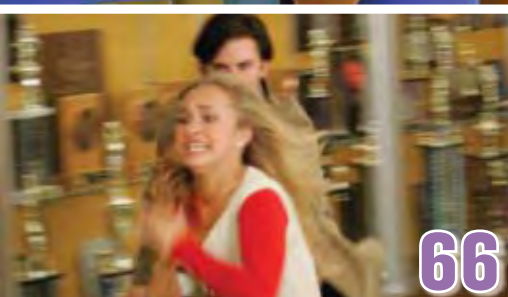
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**On the Cover:** Featuring killer designs by William Joyce, Disney's *Meet the Robinsons* paints an eye-popping vision of the future.

**MIPTV Cover:** Taffy Entertainment's *Cosmic Quantum Ray* © 2007 Mike Young Productions Ltd., Method Films, SKC&C Co., Ltd., KI.KA, ARD, Europool. All Rights Reserved.

**Cartoons on the Bay Cover:** *Pet Pals 3*: Gruppo Alconi, RaiFiction, DQ Entertainment. Developed with the support of the MEDIA Program of the European Community © All Rights Reserved.

**Correction:** Production company credit for the Coke "Happiness Factory" spot featured in Ellen Wolff's education article [April issue] belongs to Psyop and not Nathan Love.





**Y**ou hear people talk about the joy of discovery in the animation business all the time. Here at the magazine, it's a little more difficult to cherish each animated project when we're bombarded with a rich avalanche of new titles available every month. That's why events like the Annecy Festival in France and the recent Cartoon Movie confab in Germany are such blessings.

You can really find some unexpected surprises and personal projects to champion when you spend most of your day in dark screening rooms.

During last month's Cartoon Movie event in Potsdam, for example, I was pleasantly surprised by the number of original, auteur-driven features in various stages of development in Europe. Fabrice Beau and Sydelia Guirao's *Tamariata—The Cloud Child* (France's Toon Factory), Pierre Coffin's *Bones Story* (France's Mac Guff Ligne), Tor Fruegaard and Juanjo Ramirez's *Zombie Western* (Spain's Perro Verde and Denmark's Happy Flyfish), Karsten Kilerich, Thorbjorn Christoffersen and Craig Frank's hilarious *Journey to Saturn* (Denmark's A. Film) and Hayo Freitag's *The Three Robbers* (Germany's Animation-X) were some of the many projects that impressed the crowds during this three-day event.

If there was a lesson to be learned it was that the creative teams in Europe would



be much better off sticking to stories and styles that really come from their hearts and were inspired by the cultures and audiences of each territory. The movies that made my head hurt and soul sick were the ones that featured wise-cracking CG-animated sidekicks and made lame attempts at American pop culture-style humor. We all know everyone wants to make a killing at the global box-office, but why are so many

artists still trying to make pale copies of *Shrek* and *Cars*?

I recall a conversation I overheard at dinner one night. The sharp Czech producer Martin Vandas (*FilmFarum 1* and *2*) was talking about the movie business with his distributor. Vandas had brought his latest feature, the very original stop-motion project *One Night in One City* to Cartoon Movie. Directed by the talented Jan Balej, this very grown-up labor of love includes vignettes about an insect circus, a genie who grants R-rated wishes to two drunk homeless guys, a fish which strikes up a friendship with a tree and an artist who cuts off his own ear and stitches Van Gogh's ear to his head. The movie would make a perfect double bill with anything by David Lynch. But the distributor was trying to convince Vandas to make something really commercial next time to make it easier to sell overseas! "What's the use of making something artistic if nobody pays to see it?" he asked. It's questions like that which make artists reach for the nearest razor to chop off their own ears!

*Ramin*

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## Quote of the Month

"You have to be in a state of cautious optimism and egomaniacal denial at the same time ... Believe you belong there, and then go home every night and feel like a fraud. Isn't that how comedy works?"



—*Saturday Night Live* comic Amy Poehler  
who is producing and voicing the lead character  
for Nickelodeon's upcoming new series *The Mighty B.*



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## The Animation Planner

## May

**1-4** Stuttgart, Germany hosts **fmx/07** festival, which features screenings and panels on vfx, digital content and animation ([www.fmx.de](http://www.fmx.de)). fmx



features a panel on Futurikon's *Dragon Hunters*.

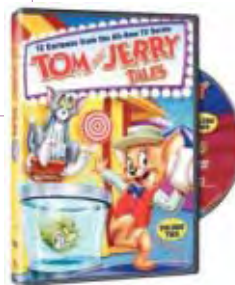
**4** Watch Peter Parker/Spidey fight his inner demons again in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man 3*, with Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, James Franco, Topher Grace and Thomas Haden Church.



**5-9** Jetsetters may feel like visiting Switzerland's **Rose d'Or** Festival which focuses on the hottest trends and shows in the TV programming universe ([www.rosedor.com](http://www.rosedor.com)).



**8** The nights are getting shorter. Hmmm, that means you have fewer night hours to watch the new DVD release *Voltron: Defenders of the Universe, Vol. 3!*



**10-11** The **Online Game Developer Conference** (held at the Fairmont Olympic in downtown Seattle) kicks off two days of panels and events tailored to the interactive game developing community ([www.ogdc2007.com](http://www.ogdc2007.com)).

**11** Who said all the great "It's the end of the world as we know it" movies were already made? Check out *28 Weeks Later*, the sequel to Danny Boyle's popular sci-fi chiller, opening in select theaters today.

**15** Last week, we didn't have a lot of animated DVD releases, but, boy, we're making up for it today! Out on the shelves are *A Pup Named Scooby-Doo Vol. 6*, *Curious George: Rocket Ride & Other Adventures*, *Tex Avery's Droopy: The Complete Theatrical Collection* and *Tom and Jerry Tales Vol. 2*.



**16-27** The usual cast of glam stars and directors will be at the 60th edition of the **Cannes Film Festival**, but the event has also become a good launching pad for animated features and shorts ([www.festival-cannes.fr](http://www.festival-cannes.fr)).



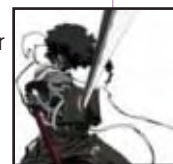
**18** It's a big month for sequels as DreamWorks' *Shrek the Third* arrives in theaters. Directed by Chris Miller and Raman Hui, the latest adventure features the voices of Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, Antonio Banderas and Julie Andrews, among others.



**19** The **Center for Cartoon Studies** in White River Junction, Vermont, opens its month-long Exhibit and Commencement event ([www.cartoonstudies.org](http://www.cartoonstudies.org)).



**22** Three months after its debut on Spike TV, *Afro Samurai: Vol. 1* is available on DVD (two versions: *Director's Cut* and *Edited*). Also available today are *Dragon Ball Z: Season 2*, *Franklin and the Turtle Lake Treasure* and *Yu-Gi-Oh! GX Vol. 3*.



**25** It wouldn't be summer without Captain Jack Sparrow and his swash-buckling adventures. Fasten your seatbelts for Gore Verbinski's third installment in the **Pirates of the Caribbean** trilogy subtitled, *At World's End*.



**29** The young kids in the family may be asking you to get them the new *Charlie and Lola: Vol. 4* DVD today. We think you may enjoy the sweet animated preschool show as well!

**31-June 3** If you love to see previews of what's new and exciting in the publishing world, check out the Big Apple's **BookExpo America** ([www.bookexpoamerica.com](http://www.bookexpoamerica.com)).



**31** New York hosts the prestigious **Annual Art Directors Club Awards** ([www.adcawards.org](http://adcawards.org)).



## Estonian Animation: Between Genius & Utter Illiteracy

By Chris Robinson

(Indiana Univ. Press, \$24.95)

As the astute director of the Ottawa International Animation Festival, Chris Robinson has certainly seen his share of excellent Estonian animated projects. That's why we are glad he's the cool cat leading us



through seven decades of art from this fascinating region of the world. Robinson knows his Elbert Tuganovs from his Riho Unts, and his writings about the animation are sprinkled with bits and pieces of social history and political insights about the region. If you'd like to learn more about Rein Raamat, want to dig deeper into the history of animation studios Joonisfilm and Nukufilm, or find out what makes Priit Pärn tick, you should definitely keep this volume by your bedside. As the author points out, "With culture becoming increasingly bland, predictable and unified, Estonian animation remains one of those rare delicacies: a voice with the ability to entertain, provoke and surprise us!" We can't think of a better person to write about these eclectic Estonian delicacies than Robinson.

## Prepare to Board! Creating Story and Characters for Animated Features and Shorts

(Focal Press, \$39.95)

By Nancy Beiman

Storyboard artist and animator Nancy Beiman has worked on a slew of top animated features in the past three decades—from *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West* and *A Goofy Movie* to *Hercules*, *Fantasia 2000* and *Treasure Planet*. That's why we're fortunate that she decided to share her wisdom and rich experiences with readers in her richly illustrated book, *Prepare to Board!* She begins her primer by focusing on the essential steps you need to take to get started, as well as creating quick sketches and thumbnails and then moves on to the usage of storyboards and shares tips on how to develop useful character designs, refining them and developing story beats. She even covers pitching storyboards, assembling story reels and creating cleanup model sheets and modeling characters in 3D. The author has a breezy, anecdote-packed style that makes reading about the craft a real pleasure. Beiman, who teaches animation at the Rochester Institute of Technology, is the kind of guiding force you wish you could have by your side at all times. Reading her book is the next best thing.



—Ramin Zahed

## Danish Treat

A couple of years ago, Denmark's **A-Film Studio** made a big impact in the Euro animation landscape with the irreverent CG-animated teen comedy, *Terkel in Trouble*. Not showing any signs of slowing down, the studio is preparing another daring project titled **Journey to Saturn**. Slated for an Easter 2008 release, the movie is based on a popular comic strip by Claus Deleuran and tells the satirical tale of what happens when Danish astronauts travel in space to find Natural Gas and accidentally cause an alien invasion of



their homeland. Directed by toon pros Karsten Kiilerich, Thorbjørn Christoffersen and Craig Frank, the pic is packed with politically incorrect jabs at everything

from Danish culture and war-crazy Americans to Muslim fundamentalists. We're hoping a brilliant U.S. distributor will make sure this inspired project sees the light of day Stateside. Note to Matt Stone and Trey Parker: Maybe you guys can help promote this like-minded project on *South Park*? ■



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# The Spectrobes Have Awakened!

Disney enters the trading-card monster arena with DS game. *by Ryan Ball*

**W**hen discussing a trading-card game where you train colorful creatures for battle, there's no escaping comparisons to certain established properties such as *Pokémon*, *Digimon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*. However, Disney is taking the concept to a whole new level with the aid of Nintendo's innovative DS handheld gaming system, which continues to inspire developers like Jupiter Corp. to explore uncharted territory.

*Spectrobes* for the DS makes full use of the device's various unique features, including the touch screen and wireless communication capabilities. Players collect normal-sized trading cards with slick graphics and a series of holes punched in them. By placing the cards against the touch screen, they can then use the stylus to make contact through the holes in a specific order to enter special codes. If the player inputs the sequence correctly, the item or creature shown on the card will be introduced into their game.

"*Spectrobes* is the first game to ever have a system of this nature that gives gamers collectible cards that can also be

used to introduce creatures into their games in this manner," says producer Aguru Tanaka of Jupiter Corp. He adds that some of the Spectrobes and items are unique to the card-input system and can't be obtained any other way.

In addition to facilitating one-on-one battles and trading with friends around the world, the DS' built-in Wi-Fi function is used for the Matchmaker mode, in which up to 16 players can participate. One player becomes the Matchmaker and invites other players to compete by accessing his or her DS. The Matchmaker then sets the rules and parameters for the tournament and decides on the player pairings. When the matches are finished, it's up to the Matchmaker to decide the winner based on each combatant's performance.

"A player does not necessarily win the

tournament just by winning the most number of matches," Tanaka explains. "The Matchmaker may ultimately elect to award first place to a player who fought skillfully, held his or her own while using weaker Spectrobes and still managed to pull off a few impressive victories."

The Spectrobes themselves start out as fossils that the player must awaken by using the DS microphone to enter voice commands. The fossils spring to life as cute, cuddly creatures that evolve into fierce fighters over time. How well each Spectrobe evolves depends on the level of care the player gives to it. This involves feeding it the right minerals in the incubation room and providing it with combat training. Tanaka tells us the main character design challenge was expressing traditional Japanese creature design with a modern manga style. The team at Jupiter also worked to give the in-game animation a snappy and quirky anime look. DynaMethod was brought on to create the opening cinematic sequence, and PolyAssets United created the in-game cinematics.

DynaMethod also produced animated webisodes that introduce the game world and provide back-story on the official Spectrobes website. "We're extremely delighted with the superb image quality DynaMethod achieved in these mini-movies," Tanaka comments. "We'd love to see it as a TV series, but nothing of that nature has been indicated yet."



The website also features data downloads and character blogs and bios. Players can use their DS to upload their game stats and acquire assets to their own personalized page, which can then be accessed by other players. In addition, users can visit the site to earn more than twenty badges for certain goals reached in the

game. Tanaka says players will also love the special Spectrobes that are only available via download from the website. "The designs are very cool," he boasts. "You'll have to download them for yourself to see what you think!" ■

**Spectrobes is now available exclusively for Nintendo DS. For more information, go to the Spectrobes web site at <http://adisney.go.com/disneyinteractivestudios/spectrobes>.**



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# Peripherals Take Center Stage at GDC '07

by Ryan Ball

Innovation in gameplay is usually the focus of the annual Game Developers Conference (GDC), but this year's event, held last month in San Francisco, Calif., offered more advancements in technology designed to enhance the gameplay experience. Gamers seeking deeper emersion into their favorite titles will have plenty of cool new gadgets to drool over as various products, including a vest that lets you feel bullet hits, make their way to retail.

The **ForceWear** vest is a product of **TN- Games** ([www.tngames.com](http://www.tngames.com)). The camouflage garment provides physical feedback, letting you know when you've been hit. A small box attaches to your game console and pumps air into the vest, activating rubber bladders and other hardware elements based on where the shot or strike is coming from. And while the directional response is realistic, it doesn't actually hurt to get nailed. In fact it kind of feels cool, though getting shot on purpose won't do much for your score. TNGames will provide developers with a simple SDK for integrating ForceWear technology into upcoming titles.

Looking for some touch? **Novint Technologies** has just the thing for gamers who want a more tactile experience while using a game controller. The **Novint Falcon** is a PC peripheral that makes use of force feedback to create artificial 3D haptic interaction with virtual objects. This June, the company will release the first games designed to work with the controller, which will allow players to pick up a basketball and feel its weight or experience the recoil of a weapon, for example. The limited edition Falcon bundle can be preordered now at [www.novint-falcon.com](http://www.novint-falcon.com).

Handling 3D objects such as computer animation models is made easier with **3DConnexion's SpaceNavigator**, a mouse-like device that allows users to in-

tuitively fly through three-dimensional, virtual environments. Fans of Google Earth, for example, can explore the globe like never before with this small but solid piece of hardware that picks up where the mouse falls short. A video demonstration can be viewed at [www.3dconnexion.com](http://www.3dconnexion.com).

**Philips** was also on hand to show off its **amBX** technology, a system of reactive ambient lights, speakers, fans and rumblers designed to plunge PC gamers deeper into the game. We covered that product line in our February issue and you can also learn more at [www.ambx.com](http://www.ambx.com).

Not to be outdone, the animation software providers were out in force at the confab, showcasing their latest solutions for making games more engaging. **Autodesk** was eager to announce that it has licensed its **HumanIK** middleware to EA for next-gen titles. The customized development library allows animated game characters to interact more realistically with digital environments, solving, for instance, the problem of skating feet in basketball games such as the upcoming **NBA Street Homecourt**.

With the recent release of **SOFTIMAGE | XSI 6**, **Avid's Softimage** is revved up to help animators take their game to the next level. As artists more than ever use multiple software packages to get the job done, interoperability is key and the company's answer to Autodesk's FBX is **Crosswalk**, which lets users seamlessly transfer XSI content to and from mixed-software 3D pipelines. Transferring animations between

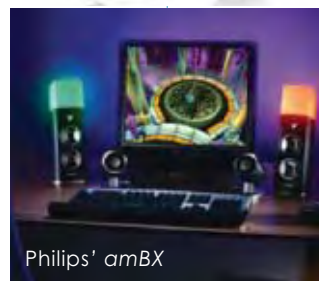
character rigs of all types is made possible by **XSI 6's MOTOR**, and the **Face Robot** animation acceleration software is designed to allow for better in-game acting.

Live-acting performances were provided by the motion-capture guys, including market leader **Vicon**, which introduced its **FK Extreme** system specifically designed for game developers and small studios. Meanwhile, New York City-based **Organic Motion** unveiled its markerless mo-cap system that is essentially a studio in a box. The first system, created to accommodate one actor at a time, will be available in the third quarter of 2007 for \$80,000. A two-character version is expected to be ready by the first quarter of 2008.

Other highlights of the 2007 Game Developers Conference included the Independent Games Festival, which saw the coveted \$20,000 Seamus McNally Grand Prize go to **Bit Blot's Aquaria**. The Game Developers Choice Awards followed with **Microsoft's Gears of War** taking Game of the Year. More details of this year's event are available at [www.gdconf.com](http://www.gdconf.com). ■



Philips' amBX



Philips' amBX



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3D Connexion's SpaceNavigator





A cartoon illustration featuring three characters in a grassy field. In the center is a zebra named Zigby, wearing red overalls and a striped shirt. To his left is a rooster with a red comb and blue body. To his right is a small yellow dog wearing a blue striped shirt and a cap. The word 'ZIGBY' is written in large, stylized, orange letters on the right side of the image.

A large, green cartoon crocodile with wide eyes and a big open mouth, wearing a rainbow-colored shirt. The crocodile is holding a circular logo that says "CROCO LOCO" and "THE LANGUAGE ADVENTURES". The background is a bright, sunny outdoor scene with trees and a blue sky.

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# A Warm and Fuzzy Future World

The team behind the new CG-animated feature *Meet the Robinsons* discusses Disney's latest time-traveling adventure.  
by Jake Friedman



**M**

ove over, Flintstones and Jetsons. This spring, a new animated family will fight for the hearts of audiences around the world. (Well, that's until Fox's *The Simpsons Movie* takes over in July!) The ambitious and visually stunning CG pic from Disney Feature Animation, *Meet the Robinsons*, hopes to be more than just another computer-animated film to clog up the box office.

From conception throughout execution, the filmmakers pulled out every stop to make its cohesive story erupt from the imaginative sources in a way that stands out in a crowded field. Based on William Joyce's acclaimed children's book, *A Day with Wilbur Robinson*, the film takes the audience on a time-traveling quest with a fantastical family into alternate futures where anything can and does happen.

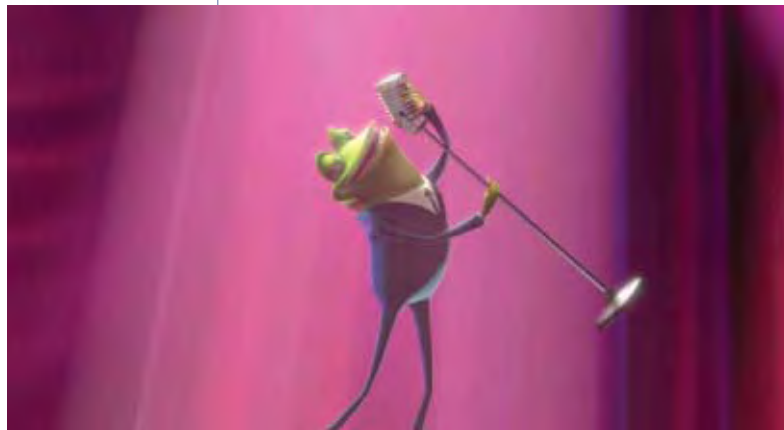
"What's really unique about the movie is the cast of characters—that's the thing that I'm the most excited about," says director Stephen Anderson, who has been on the project since late 2002. "They're very human, they have vulnerabilities, they have hopes and dreams that I think you really care about and you latch onto these characters for those things. Even the villain is very human, and I'm really

looking forward to seeing how people respond to these characters, and I hope they fall in love with them as much as I have."

The plot revolves around Lewis, an orphan boy genius/inventor who decides to uncover the identity of his parents. He is taken to a streamlined, utopian future by the time-traveling Wilbur Robinson to uncover his past and outsmart the sinister Bowler Hat Guy, all the while encountering numerous memorable friends along the way. To create this fantasy, it took Disney's Burbank studio more than four years and about 200 artisans, including art director Robh Ruppel (*Mulan*, *Treasure Planet*, *Brother Bear*), to see this project out to its completion.

"We started out with inspirational boards and did a ton of research, and because I was actually trained as an industrial designer, I know a lot of stuff first hand," says Ruppel, who led the teams to design everything in the film from the wardrobes, to the lighting, to the dazzling

futuristic city. "We looked at industrial designers who defined the look of streamlined moderne, like from the World's Fair of '39. It was more aeronautical than art deco, back when people were visualizing a grand future with amazing technology and flying cars. We just made that into a reality." Ruppel was inspired by artists like Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss and Harold Van Doren, as well as cinema-



tographers Vittorio Storaro and Caleb Dechanel, not to mention the artistic collaboration from author/illustrator William Joyce himself.

"I made compilation sheets of reference that included images of eye-popping Technicolor, old popular mechanics magazines, old movies," says Joyce, who





**The Bad and the Beautiful:** After seeing the first cut of the movie, John Lasseter offered several suggestions to make the pic a stronger experience for the audience. As a result, the hero's journey has a darker emotional impact and the villain (The Bowler Hat Guy) is a more sinister character.



William Joyce



Stephen Anderson

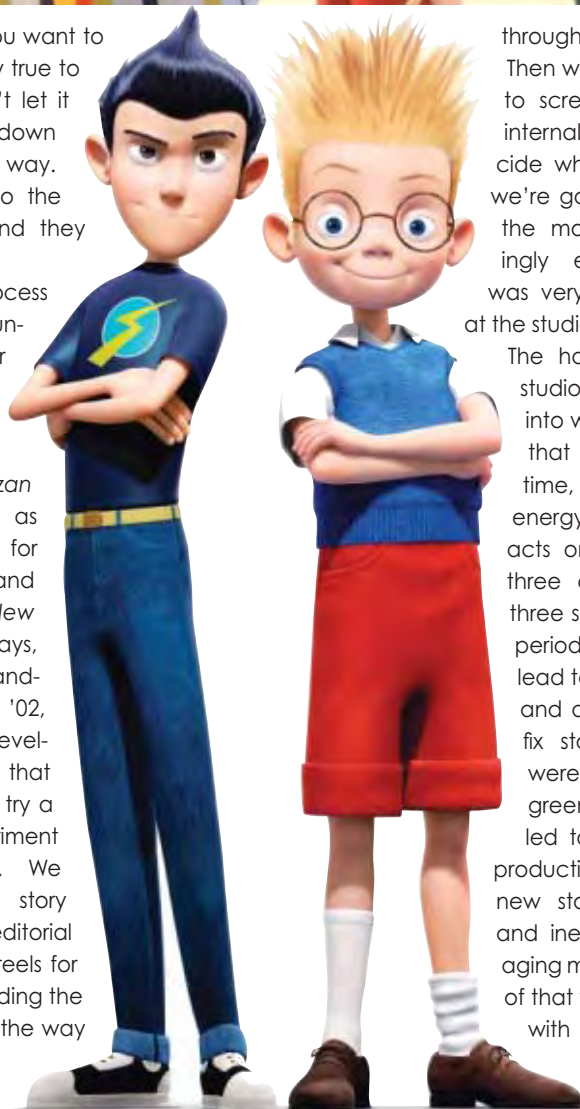


Robh Ruppel

worked closely on the production as executive producer. Besides writing and illustrating a half-dozen children's books, Joyce created Playhouse Disney's *Rolie Polie Olie*, PBS's *George Shrinks* and had been a character designer at Pixar before *Meet the Robinsons* started production. He also produced and did character design for Fox's 2005 hit feature, *Robots*. Throughout the process, Joyce would submit drawings, art samples and story ideas from his home in Louisiana to the staff in Burbank. "Early on, there were story points in the movie that appeared too purposefully to be straight out of the book," he says. "And I said, 'The book's a lark; the movie should be a lark. I ap-

preciate that you want to stay so perfectly true to things, but don't let it weigh things down and get in the way. Just stay true to the spirit of it.' And they did."

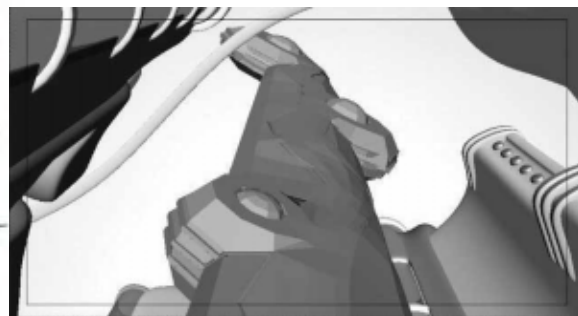
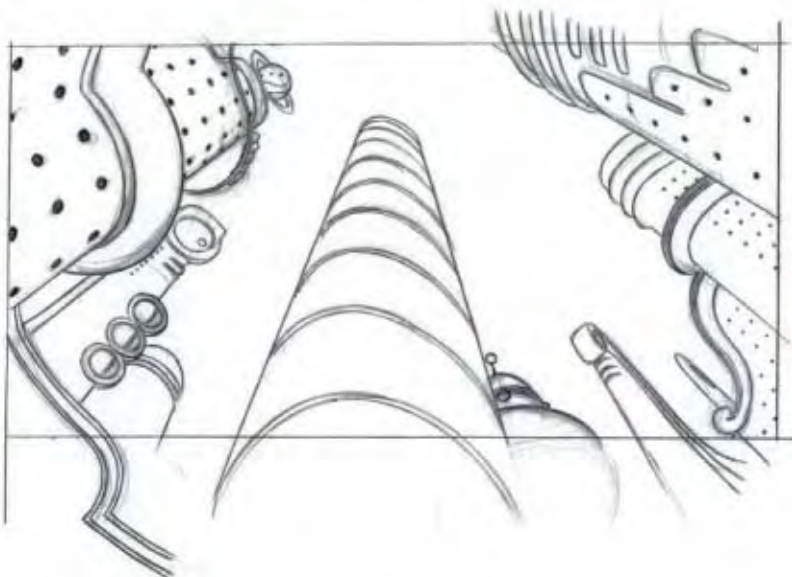
The story process for the film was unconventional for Anderson, who had started at Disney in 1995 with *Tarzan* and worked as head of story for *Brother Bear* and *The Emperor's New Groove*. He says, "When I was handed the script in '02, our head of development said that they wanted to try a different experiment with this movie. We assembled a story crew and an editorial crew and built reels for this movie, boarding the entire movie all the way



through from A to Z. Then we were going to screen the reels internally and decide whether or not we're going to make the movie. Amazingly enough, this was very unheard of at the studio."

The habit that the studio had fallen into was a process that took more time, money and energy. Boarding acts one, two and three of a film at three separate time periods would often lead to going back and attempting to fix story bits that were already green-lit, which led to holding up production, creating new story problems and inevitably damaging morale. "None of that was the case with this movie,"





**Building Tomorrowland:** *Meet the Robinsons'* production designer Robh Ruppel has been inspired by William Joyce's creative vision of a future that is also a throwback to a kinder, gentler portrait of everytown, U.S.A.—sort of like *Oliver Twist* meets *The Jetsons* in Mayberry.



says Anderson. "We got to stake our flag in the ground and say, 'This is our movie, if you want to make it, let's make it.'" The screening of the finished boards in November '03

was met with overwhelming praise.

According to a revealing story in *The New York Times*, Anderson got extensive notes from Disney's Animation chief creative officer and Pixar co-founder John Lasseter last March during a grueling six-hour meeting. Lasseter suggested to make the villain scarier, and as a result, 60 percent of the original film was cut and an evil sidekick was added. In the final version of the film, our orphan's adventures have a more emotional kick to them. "The audience is going to be sobbing," Lasseter says in the piece. "It is really going to get them."

It was decided that the project was going to be CG-animated before Anderson or Ruppel were brought onto the project. "There was no motion-capture at all, which I think made everything look much more alive," asserts Ruppel. "Even though some of the characters' movements are broad and sometimes very quick, it's much more believable, I think, than a motion-capture performance." Proprietary ani-

mation tools within Maya were used to create the character animation, and a proprietary piece of software called Paint 3D was used for texture-painting. All of the 2D digital painting was done in Photoshop. Adds Anderson, "I think when you're watching it you forget you're watching a computer-animated movie. I'm amazed at the amount of warmth, heart and character that you could get in 3D."

"It's so sweet and gigantic and joyful like those old motion pictures were, but without being treacly," Joyce promises. "It just puts you in a good mood. You feel like you've had a grand ol' time at the movies." ■

**Jake Friedman is a New York-based writer and animator. You can visit him online at [jakefriedman.net](http://jakefriedman.net).**

**Disney's *Meet the Robinsons* is now playing in theaters across U.S. and Europe. It will have a slow roll-out in various other territories through the summer.**





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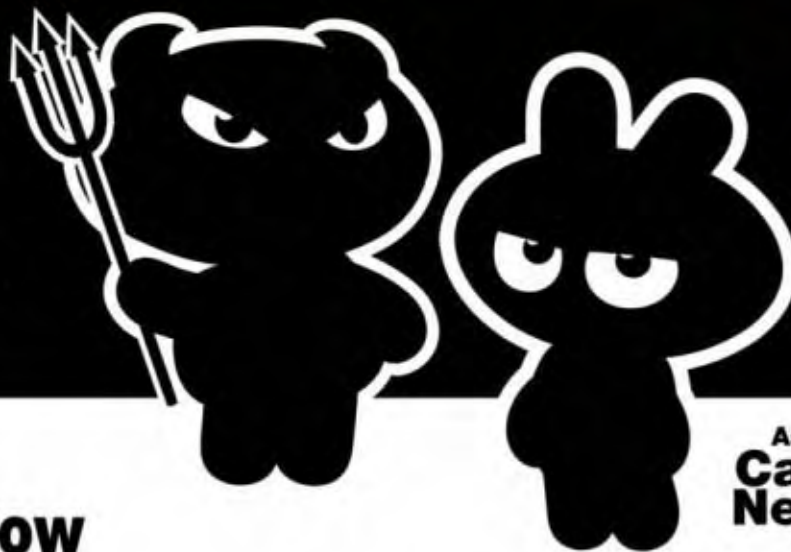


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# Anger Management in Toon Town!

More than before, disgruntled animators are fuming about the way the industry suits are treating them. Is this a new trend or is the blogosphere just fanning the flames of discontent and jealousy?

by Michael Mallory

**Y**ou know that old joke that goes something like, "How do you piss off an artist? You hire him." One-liners aside, one cannot deny that a seething volcanic anger is raging through the entire American animation industry, and hiring has very little to do with it. Not hiring has a lot more, but that is only one of an entire laundry list of reasons for the phenomenon.

In a period that has been described by some as the best time for the art form, just why are so many people so pissed?

Whether one longs for the passion and lifetime employment of the Golden Age, the predictably seasonal work of the 1960-1970s television era, or the high salaries of the mid-1990s traditional toon boom, the fact is those days are gone, never to return.

"It's really wearing on people that in the last eight or nine years we've had a live-action template in animation instead of long-term employment," says Animation Guild Local 839 (IATSE) business rep Steve Hulett. "It's gig-to-gig-to-gig, and you hustle and you network; it's pretty much like live action has been for below-the-line individuals forever."

For a medium that has always been special, that is a bitter pill.

While many artists are having trouble finding work, there are still many others

who are working ... but under stress. "I think there's a frustration among artists who really want to work in 2D and they can't, they're being forced to work in 3D," says Charles Zembillas, the founder of the [animationnation.com](http://animationnation.com) website and an independent character designer, producer, director and educator.

The "death" of 2D has, of course, been a rallying cry for the past several years, and one might think that the return of traditional Disney feature animation with *The Frog Princess* would be greeted with hosannas. But those cheers have not materialized, probably because of the slow pace of development and the fact that no animators have been hired yet.

## Be Careful What You Wish For

One lingering source of dissatisfaction can be traced to industry-wide *sequelitis*, and the belief that studios are greenlighting too many mediocre projects. So when Pixar's John Lasseter took over the reins at Disney Feature over a year ago, hopes were high. His white charger quickly threw a shoe though, in the form of 120 pink slips to existing staff, with little

**Why is everyone so angry?** Traditional artists have had enough of their jobs being sent overseas and everyone jumping on the CG and performance-capture bandwagon (to heck with those damn penguins!). Meanwhile animators continue to complain about studio suits and development execs with no artistic background nor real love for animation.

or no replacement hiring. Coming so soon after the layoffs of 2001 and 2002, insiders say this put a pall over the entire studio, moralewise.

## And the Oscar Goes to... Mo-Cap

This is the big one: the looming dominance of motion-capture CGI in the animation industry. "Ever since rotoscope was invented there's been a feeling among animators that it was a kind of cheating, and some of that has carried over into mo-cap," says veteran animator, producer and consultant Frank Gladstone, who's held various positions at Disney, DreamWorks and, most recently, Starz Animation (formerly IDT Ent.). "The thinking is that it's not really animation."

The powder keg was truly lit when *Happy Feet*, which utilized mo-capped body animation, took the Oscar, beating out the even more heavily mo-capped *Monster House* and the no-capped *Cars*. Although the general public isn't really aware of the difference in production technique, many in the community were fuming. "That really struck a nerve," says ASIFA-Hollywood president Antran Manoogian. "It was amazing to see the reactions in the blogosphere that came out after that happened."

For some, the issue has become personal. "If you've done this a long time and you really love the look of a drawing that comes to life, it really hurts when people call mo-cap animation," says animation artist Mark Kausler, whose many credits include *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast* and the Cartoon Network series, *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi*. He suggests the term *digital puppeteering* be adopted instead. "What makes people mad is that we're being lumped

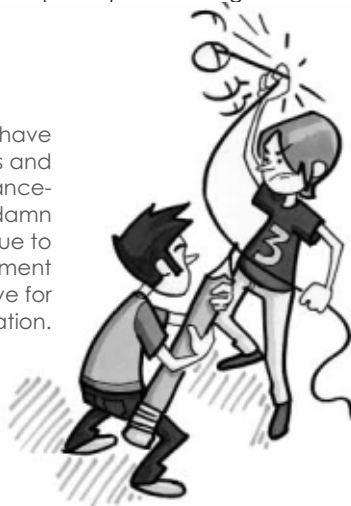
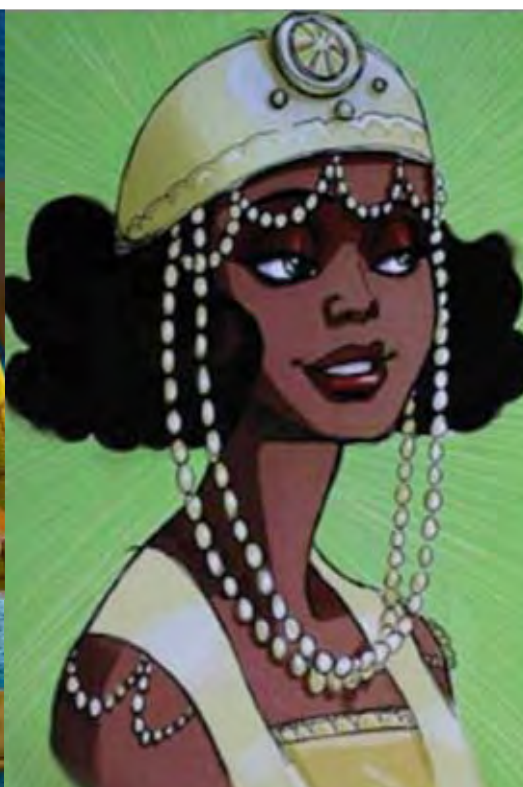


Illustration by Mercedes Milligan





Antran  
Manoogian



Chris deFaria



Charles  
Zembillas



Frank Gladstone



Mark Kausler



Steve Hulett

**They've Got Issues:** (Clockwise from top left) Disney/Pixar's round of firings and hirings for the *Toy Story 3* movie, the slow death of 2D animation at the movies (which may be quite overrated as Disney announced last month that its *Frog Princess* feature will be traditionally animated!) and the Oscar win for *Happy Feet* which was a mo-cap animated feature are some of the events that have ruffled town feathers this past year.



in with something that's completely different from what we do," he explains.

The complaining has reached the front office. But Chris deFaria, exec VP of digital animation and visual effects for Warner Bros., which produced *Happy Feet*, points out that the technique is not replacing the work of animators. "There's not performance capture out there that does not require traditional animation tools to be laid on top of it," says deFaria, who prefers the term *performance-capture* to *mo-cap* when talking about animation as opposed to *vfx*. "There are times when performance-capture is an artistic choice, but it's not appropriate for every movie."

A perceived lack of leadership; too many mediocre formulaic projects be-

ing greenlit; crippling competition for jobs; disdain for suits running things who have no background in animation or art (which frankly is as much a tradition in animation as the two-martini lunch)—all of this has added to the anger that has spared no one. Even Roy Disney, the hero of the Eisner Wars, which paved the way for 2D's return at Disney, was blog-bludgeoned for it, an act of sniping that Zembillas says prompted a personal "crisis of faith in animation."

Some industry watchers say that's a big problem in itself. Left unchecked, the sheer volume and power of negativity may consume the industry. "Nothing good comes from negativity," says Zembillas. "Why bless the darkness when you can go to the light?"

So how can those suffering from a prolonged winter of discontent put on a happy face? Kausler's answer is simple: Log off and pick up a pencil. "Traditionally trained animators and people who love drawings that come to life should be making pictures," says

Kausler, who is currently making a film called *There Must Be Some Other Cat*. "Don't spend all day blogging! Draw!" ■

**Michael Mallory is a Los Angeles-based writer who specializes in animation. He is the author of many books, including *X-Men: The Characters and Their Universe*, *Marvel: The Characters and Their Universe* and *Hanna-Barbera Cartoons*.**





# Cherished Indian Myth Gets the Toon Treatment

Kahani World and Virgin Comics' *Secrets of the Seven Sounds* retells the *Ramayana* tales for children.

It's been over two decades since Indian-born medical doctor and author Deepak Chopra made a huge impact on the New Age market with his 1986 book *Creating Health*. In 1994, his international best-seller *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* and his PBS shows and DVDs continued to attract more fans all over the world. This year, he'll be creating waves in the animation market as he has joined forces with Toronto-based Indian content creation company Kahani World and Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Comics to co-produce an animated movie based on the ancient Indian myth *Ramayana*.

Attributed to the poet Valmiki, *Ramayana* consists of 24,000 verses which tell the story of Prince Ram of Ayodhya, whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon king of Lanka. Like India's other major epic, *The Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* includes the teachings of ancient Hindu sages and presents them through allegory. The poem was the inspiration for a hugely successful live-action TV series, written and directed by Ramanand Sagar, which aired on India's Doordarshan channel in 1987 and 1988.

The new animated project *Secrets of the Seven Sounds* is targeted at kids in the seven-year-old range and up. That's why the narrative centers on the younger brother of the Chosen One. While Prince Ram seeks to rescue his beloved Princess Sita and save the world from the evil Lord Ravan, we also get to see how Lux, the prince's 11-year-old brother, deals with the adventures that life casts his way.

"*The Ramayan* continues to be the bedrock of India's cultural identity in ways that no other myth can claim," says Chopra, who is also the chairman of Virgin Comics. "The *Seven Sounds* animated film is a marvelous way to share this story and inspire children around the world."

Animation veteran Biren Ghose, who heads up Kahani World and is exec producing the movie, believes that although these characters have an iconic status in India, they have a universal appeal that will translate to audiences everywhere. "We aim to put a new spin on storytelling, blending stories that may have an 'Indian DNA,' but which thrive in the contemporary context and culture of the global

kidizen!" he points out. "Virgin Comics and Virgin Animation have succeeded in straddling the East-West paradigm with equal excellence and are an inspiration and benchmark for what Kahani seeks to achieve as a company."

The feature was penned by Gotham Chopra and Sharad Devarajan, Virgin Comics CEO, and Jeevan Kang. According to Ghose, Indian director Skekhar Kapur (*Bandit Queen*, *Elizabeth* and its upcoming sequel *The Golden Age*) is also involved in the production.

Virgin Comics was founded by in November '05 by billionaire Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Group, author Deepak Chopra, filmmaker Kapur, Deepak's son Gotham and the Gotham Entertainment Group. Based in New York City and Bangalore, India, Virgin Comics has published successful titles such as *Devi*, *The Sadhu*, John Woo's *Seven Brothers*, *Snakewoman*, *Ramayana 3392 A.D.* and others.

Gotham Chopra believes this is the right time for the world to really dive into the rich cultural and mythological epics that have influenced Indian culture for thousands of years. "With Kahani, we are excited to be bringing one of the greatest Indian legends, re-fashioned, to the world, and in doing so, creating new planetary myths that people everywhere can enjoy. This is just the start!"

—Ramin Zahed

For more info, visit [www.kahani-world.com](http://www.kahani-world.com), [www.virgincomics.com](http://www.virgincomics.com) or [www.gothamcomics.com](http://www.gothamcomics.com).



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# Springtime for Toon Fanatics

Fans of SpongeBob, Billy and Mandy, Teen Titans, The Batman and Silverwing will find plenty to keep them away from the great outdoors this month. *by Claire Webb*

## Billy and Mandy's Big Boogey Adventure [Turner, \$14.98]

In case you forgot to TiVo this TV movie that premiered on Cartoon Network on March 30, do not fret. A mere four days after the airdate, you can add the wacky feature to your DVD collection!

The movie spawns from the hit CN series *The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy* that bowed on the network in June 2003. Created by Maxwell Atoms, the show is pre-

mised on two 10-year-old tots, Billy and Mandy, and their unusual choice of companion, the Grim Reaper. After the children emerge triumphant in a limbo match with the summoner of death at Billy's birthday party, the happy-go-lucky pair wins Grim as their new best friend for life. In this full-length feature project, Billy, Mandy and their trusty pal take on the Boogey Man and a crew of monster pirates to uncover an artifact that will make the owner into the scariest creature alive. The DVD also packs bonus extras like the short *Bully Boogie*. Death certainly becomes them!

**[Release date: April 3]**

## Teen Titans: The Complete Third Season The Batman: The Complete Third Season [Warner, \$19.98 each]

You can easily team up your spending and get a double dose of super-power by purchasing both of these Warner Bros./DC Comics releases this month. After just releasing its first movie-length DVD in February, Cartoon Net-



work's *Teen Titans* comes back with a new package featuring the third season of the show. Robin the Boy Wonder leads the gang of superheroes, which includes Raven, Cyborg,

Starfire and Beast Boy, into extraordinary adventures and battles against evil forces like the malevolent Trigon and the mysterious Slade. The action-based series from creators Sam Register and Glen Murakami complements *The Batman* series released on the same day! *The Batman* offers its third season with a bang as a young Bruce Wayne encounters new villains and delivers justice like never before. In this season, Barbara Gordon (a.k.a. Batgirl) becomes a regular fixture in the Caped Crusader's family and action storylines. Meanwhile Poison Ivy, Cosmo Krank/Toymaker and Temblor wreak their usual havoc on Gotham City. The two-disc edition features 13 action-packed episodes and entertaining extras with stunning animation and fresh characters that truly pump up the volume.

**[Release date: April 10]**

## SpongeBob SquarePants: Friend or Foe? [Paramount, \$16.99]

Nickelodeon's *SpongeBob SquarePants* is back in action and shaking things up in Bikini Bottom again this month with the release of seven brand-new episodes from the show's fifth season. Stephen Hillenbert's yellow, absorbent hero finds himself in all kinds of situations in this outing as he uncovers the

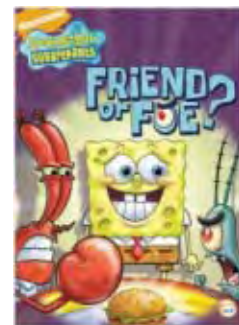
secret to the rivalry between Mr. Krabs and Plankton. The trusty sponge also embarks on adventures like attempting to impress a world-renowned chef, trying his hand at becoming a spy and much more. Tom Kenny voices his most famous character through episodes like "Spy Buddies," "Fungus Among Us," "The Original Fry Cook" and the title episode of the DVD "Friend or Foe?" So break out your debit card from the last *SpongeBob* package you bought in January and pick up this new and exciting underwater adventure.

**[Release date: April 17]**

## Silverwing: Season One [FUNimation, \$14.98]

Based on the best-selling trilogy by Kenneth Oppel, this animated series from Bardel Entertainment begins with the struggle between two opposing species: the birds and the beasts. After a historic battle to balance the forces of nature and establish territorial boundaries, with bats indifferent to either side, a peace treaty is adopted with the condition that bats become banished to the darkness of night as punishment for rejecting both sides. Then, after thousands of years, a young bat called Shade Silverwing ignites the fire of the conflict once more by gazing at the sun, thus breaking the treaty and angering the tyrant owls. Now, with his family scattered and displaced from Tree Haven, Silverwing and his friends must save his family from annihilation and defeat his enemies. With the first 13 episodes of this breakthrough series, this DVD is sure to keep you up well into the night rethinking the origins one of the world's mysterious creatures.

**[Release date: April 17] ■**









# The Samurai Critic:

Reviews of the latest anime releases on DVD

by Charles Solomon



Illustration by Pres Romanillos

In Japan, as in America, making a TV series out of a popular animated feature is a tap dance over an artistic minefield. And when the original film is considered a landmark, the dance becomes that much more perilous and the mines more deadly—which makes the success of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* doubly impressive.

Mamoru Oshii's 1995 feature *Ghost in the Shell* ranks among the most admired and influential animated films of recent years. Based on the manga by Masamune Shirow, it largely defined the cyberpunk genre and was a major source of inspiration for the *Matrix* trilogy in the U.S. The skillful blending of drawn animation and computer-generated imagery excited artists and fans, setting the pattern for many anime science-fiction adventures.

The film is set in a dystopic, not-too-distant future, when the government uses lifelike cyborgs or "enhanced" humans for undercover work. That premise has been used in sci-fi anime before and since, but Oshii pushed the envelope further to create the memorable heroine Major Motoko Kusanagi. Looking like a cross between a Playmate of the Year and The Terminator's sister, she fought through a tangled web of intrigue in pursuit of the mysterious super-hacker known as The Puppet Master.

*Stand Alone Complex*, the 2002 TV series produced by Production I.G which first aired on Japan's Animax channel, takes place in a parallel world, where Kusanagi didn't disappear into The Net, but remains at the center of Public Security Section 9. Chief Aramaki heads the Section, but it's the Major's orders the officers jump to obey as they tackle malefactors in a deadly city of mecha, cyborgs, humans, and human-prosthetic hybrids. *Stand Alone Complex* often feels closer in spirit to the original setting and characters than Oshii's visually dazzling but incomprehensible sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004).

As with all TV adaptations, its production values are noticeably lower, and director Ken-



ji Kamiyama never matches Oshii's inspired, staccato camerawork. Oshii alternates sequences of rapid-fire action with moody but static dialogue scenes in which the characters tried to sort out the convoluted plot. Kamiyama didn't have the budget for state-of-the-art CG or the more elaborate visuals, but he generally keeps the action moving over the 26-episode season.

Batou, Kusanagi's second-in-command, is a more interesting character in the television series than he was in the second feature, when he took over for the vanished Major. He's as deadly in a combat as ever, but this Batou connects with the other characters, instead of endlessly quoting philosophers. Akio Otsuka's velvety bass-baritone makes Batou an even more compelling presence on the original Japanese track than Richard Epcar's

rougher tones in the English dub.

Although the storyline of *Stand Alone Complex* is somewhat easier to follow than the plots of the features, it's still a tangled mixture of politics and cyber-espionage. Another über-hacker lies at the center of the story: The Laughing Man, whose pseudonym is tied to the J.D. Salinger story of that name. This arch cyber-criminal leads Kusanagi and Batou into a web of deceit and death that links government ministers to bogus cures and cover-ups surrounding the deadly disease "cyberbrain sclerosis." When Kusanagi and Batou close in on their prey, the

filmmakers recapture some of the menace and excitement of the original feature.

In a secondary story, the Tachikomas—crab-like robots Section 9 officers use in situations where humans can't go—begin to develop individual personalities and an awareness of their existence. After searching through books such as *Flowers for Algernon* and *I, Robot* for answers, the Tachikomas puzzle over the implications of their growing consciousness. Their high-pitched, childish voices, which are modeled on the performance of Japanese actress Sakiko Tamagawa on the original soundtrack, may grate on Western ears. It certainly sounds odd to hear a bunch of Munchkin voices engaging in heavy philosophical discussions.

*Stand Alone Complex* ends not with a peaceful resolution of The Laughing Man's crimes, but with Kusanagi, Batou, et al. tackling a new case that leads into the next series *S.A.C. (2nd Gig)* SE. Nothing is simple in the world of Masamune and Oshii, and some questions are left unanswered, just as they were in the original films. But *Stand Alone Complex* is a darkly entertaining series that delivers plenty of action. ■

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# A New CG Take on the Hundred Acre Wood Gang

Disney's new preschool show *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* gives a CG face-lift to a classic—but wait, what happened to poor Christopher Robin?

by Claire Webb

"It's a very funny thought that, if Bears were Bees, They'd build their nests at the bottom of trees. And that being so (if the Bees were Bears), We shouldn't have to climb up all these stairs."

— A.A. Milne

As the above verses illustrate, the late British author A.A. Milne knew a few things about switching characters and combining different elements of storytelling. With the same playful mindset, the team at Disney TV Animation has given Milne's beloved characters from the Hundred Acre Wood a modern CG polish in the new preschool show *My Friends Tigger & Pooh*.

The origins of the upcoming series go back to 2005 when traditional Winnie-the-Pooh advocate, writer Brian Hohlfeld, got the greenlight to construct the 26 episode series for Disney Channel and immediate-

ly began working on the adventures that would compose each episode. Here is how Hohlfeld, who has worked on features such as *Pooh's Heffalump Movie* (2005) and *Piglet's Big Movie* (2003), explains the tone of the project. "I wanted it to be like the old featurettes and the features and to be very true to the Pooh world because we don't want to disappoint all the fans who love these characters."

Don MacKinnon (*Buzz Lightyear of Star Command*, *Pooh's Heffalump Movie*) who co-directs the show with Dave Hartman concurs. "I think it's very much in line with the original series," he notes. "It's very true to the old *Winnie the Poohs*."

That said, purists may have a heart attack when they see all the changes and additions made to transform the property into a 2007-era interactive, learning-focused preschool property designed to appeal to a new demographic. "Two major things about this series make it different from any other *Winnie-the-Pooh* series or movie: Number one, it's in CG, and num-

ber two, we have introduced a new character, a six-year-old girl named Darby who leads them on adventures," emphasizes Hohlfeld. Indeed the well-known Christopher Robin has been replaced by a spunky little girl (who slightly resembles Christopher) and her dog Buster. The new heroine leads her pals from the Hundred Acre Wood into adventures

where they become "super sleuths" and solve "very whimsical little mysteries much in the vein of the old *Winnie the Pooh* stories," says MacKinnon.

Hohlfeld says the change enabled the writers to become more creative with the stories than before. "It's very hard coming up with stories for this set of characters because there is really no conflict within the group," he adds. "So, I thought bringing in a contemporary girl would sort of liven things up a bit and would help jumpstart some stories. We thought that new audiences might be able to relate to her better than the traditional stories and she would be their way into these adven-



Brian Hohlfeld



Don MacKinnon



tures." He is quick to reassure, "I think once they see the new character they will just fall in love with her!"

As for the major stylistic change, the creative team believed transforming the Hundred Acre Wood into a colorful CG utopia would have a great modernizing effect. The treatment certainly worked for Disney Channel's other preschool hit, *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse*, last year. "I love [working in CG]!" admits MacKinnon. "The thing that I like about [CG], is that it releases you from the in/out left/right world of 2D animation and opens up a whole new approach that is much more akin to live action."

He also asserts that these classic characters lend themselves readily to CG because of their original rounded design. Hohlfeld adds, "We didn't find we had to change much character-wise, [however] there were some limitations. We had to limit the number of characters and backgrounds just because it costs more, but that only made us more creative."

In terms of the logistics of production, Hohlfeld says while the majority of the production was done at Disney's home in Burbank, much of the animation was completed at Polygon Studio in Tokyo, Japan. "Honestly, I think once you see these characters in 3D, because these animators have done such a good job bringing them to life, you almost couldn't imagine it any other way," Hohlfeld emphasizes.

When presented with the suggestion that some old fans may be disgruntled by this ultra-modern take on Winnie-the-Pooh, MacKinnon initially chuckles, "Well, are they still in favor of vaudeville or what?" He then continues on a more serious note, "I'm very proud of this project, and it's very true to the old Pooh fea-

tures, but we just added a new dimension to it." Hohlfeld embodies the same confidence in the crew's work on *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* and asks that skeptics simply watch the show to recognize the heart and soul put into the project. "To me it's just a privilege to work with this set of characters that is so well-known and so well loved," Hohlfeld articulates. "It's wonderful to come to work and have to live in the Hundred Acre Wood all day!"

And although the creative team of directors and writers try to keep the originals and the nostalgia of longtime fans in mind when designing the series, the truth is, the show is meant for preschoolers who are just beginning to become fans of Pooh. So really, the target audience of the show

takes into account the new audience and their interpretation of *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* as an interactive series that must grab the attention of a new generation of children. "I can't understand why anyone would be angry about it being done in CG."

So as once 2D, timeless properties like Winnie-the-Pooh make the jump to CG, the question arises: Is this where TV animation is going in the future? MacKinnon says that although production still needs to achieve a balance between the artistic skills of 2D and the more technical elements of CG, he believes the latter is the wave of the future. "I think [CG] is where things are headed. I don't think 2D is completely dead, but I think CG from project



**The Bear Stays in the Picture:** Disney Channel's new series *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* offers a CG-animated polish on A.A. Milne's characters and replaces good old Christopher Robin with a spunky new girl character called Darby.

won't be aware that these characters have been changed in any way since this show might be their first experience with the Winnie-the-Pooh cast of characters. "Kids are open-minded enough that once they see [the show], they are on board. I think kids are more open-minded than adults," Hohlfeld explains. And while MacKinnon acknowledges the show's preservation of the old whimsy, he also

to project gets better as people get used to it," he notes. Bottom line, *My Friends Tigger & Pooh* is still a whimsical series that shares Milne's original ideas about the importance of friendship and community. And who can argue with that? ■

***My Friends Tigger & Pooh* premieres Sat., May 12 (10 a.m. ET/PT) on the Disney Channel as part of the Playhouse Disney block.**



# Dynamic Dozen

We pick 12 animated shows that are making a big splash at the MIPTV market this year.

If you're anything like the staff of Animation Magazine, your head begins to spin around this time of the year. Yes, spring is in the air, our allergies are acting up and we're drowning in a sea of information about all the new animated projects debuting at the MIPTV market, taking place at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes this month (April 16-20). A special focus on Italian productions, MILIA (audiovisual digital content creation) and a digital pitching session are only three of the show's big highlights. We wish we could focus on all the animated shows popping up at the Palais, but on these pages, we had to limit ourselves to a dozen picks. If you need a more comprehensive listing, check out our handy MIPTV pocketguide or visit [www.miptv.com](http://www.miptv.com).

## Those Giant Italian Reptiles!

Italian studio **Animundi** has high hopes for its new TV series **Jurassic Cubs - The Journeys of the Black Meteorite**. The show centers on five prehistoric dinos (Saro, Bronto, Stego, Ranu and Nunzy) who are searching for their mysteriously vanished parents.

The 26x13 package follows the fab five as they travel through time. (What is it with these dinos and their ability to break the space/time continuum!?) According to the folks at the Rome-based studio, our Jurassic journeyers visit the pyramids of ancient Egypt, hang out with the Greeks during their first Olympiad, witness the building of the famous Arena in Imperial Rome, and yes, are you ready for this?—zap themselves to a city of the future populated by robots!

The studio has already secured the participation of Rai Fiction and ai Due TV Channel and will be seeking distribution via Mondo TV in 60 countries. France's Megafilms and U.S.-based outfit Sandra Carter Global have also expressed interest in the project.

Among the special plans the producers have for the property is a unique episode created in stereoscopic 3D (yes, you'll need blue-and-red 3D glasses) for DVD/home video and PayTV distribution. The team is also developing a tie-in Jurassic Cubs card game and a videogame featuring the five characters. Could it be that dinosaurs are making a big comeback this year!



## The Tribe Has Spoken

If you've been hungering for your ancient tribal roots, then you'll have to take a look at **EM. Entertainment's** new show **Enyo**. This very original fantasy-adventure series uses state-of-the-art CG animation to tell the story of a gifted 12-year-old who is adopted by a prehistoric nomadic tribe called the Doodjies.

"His eccentric behavior is a source of amusement at first, but the laughter may die down if the tribesmen knew that one day he'll be the greatest shaman and teacher," says Dominique Neudecker, EM. Entertainment's director of international productions and broadcast.

According to Neudecker, *Enyo* will captivate the audience with remarkable, state-of-the-art CG animation depicting an archaic and mystical world before our time. "Despite the fact that G-animated content has experienced substantial growth, we believe in the variety of



techniques such as CG, 2D, Flash, etc., in order to keep our program portfolio comprehensive and competitive," he adds. "The appropriate technique depends on the content and the anticipated style of the program and the related target group."

Co-produced with Magma Films and Funkhauser Film, the series has a delivery date of winter 2008. In addition, EM. Entertainment has a jam-packed portfolio of toons ready to catch buyers' attention at the market. As Neudecker points out, "From our perspective, unique and strong character-driven preschool shows such as *Zigby* or formats with educational elements such

as our edutainment language series *Croco Loco*, as well as action-comedy toons with a strong visual look (*Master Raindrop*) and humor and gag-driven formats (*Staines Down Drains*) will continue to dominate and be in demand."

continued on page 32



# Courageous Crustaceans

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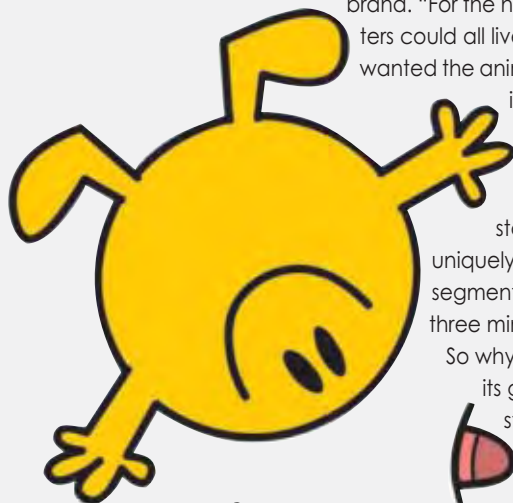
## A Mr. Man (or Little Miss) for Every Season

Familiar Face psychedelic-colored 1970s will recall a hot property called Mr. Men. Now, thanks to the efforts of exec producer Diana Manson (Silver Lining) and the parent company **Chorion**, a new Flash-animated series based on the little guys (and gals) will be making the rounds at MIPTV this year.

According to Manson, Chorion bought the rights to the property because they saw a major potential to bringing new life to the brand. "For the new TV series [*The Mr Men Show*], we wanted to create a world where the characters could all live together because in the books, they live in different lands," she points out. "We wanted the animation to evoke the 70s, the period when the books were written. We also wanted it to be bright and textured in a new and intriguing way—a classic reinvention of an old property."

Animated by Flash experts Renegade Animation in Glendale, Calif., the series incorporates a sketch comedy format. "We didn't want to churn out another story-based show—we have 25 characters to involve," says Manson. "This format is uniquely adaptable for broadcasters and other platform-users as it can be broken up into segments. Each segment is self-contained and they vary in length from 10 seconds to three minutes!"

So why does Manson think the show will click with today's kids and their parents? "I think it's got so much to do with the variety of characters that Roger Hargreaves created, starting with Mr. Tickle in 1971," she says. "They embody a whole range of different personality traits that children can recognize in themselves or the people around them. And because the characters themselves are not exactly human in appearance their appeal and the comedy they generate are not limited to any particular country."



## Back to Busytown

Anyone who's familiar with award-winning children's books knows that author/illustrator Richard Scarry (1919-1994) has a very special place in this magical realm. In the 1990s, the books were adapted for

animation by Cinar in a popular series titled *The Busy World of Richard Scarry*. This year, **Cookie Jar Entertainment** (the new and improved version of Cinar) brings a new series to the market inspired by Scarry's creations, called *Hurray for Huckle!*

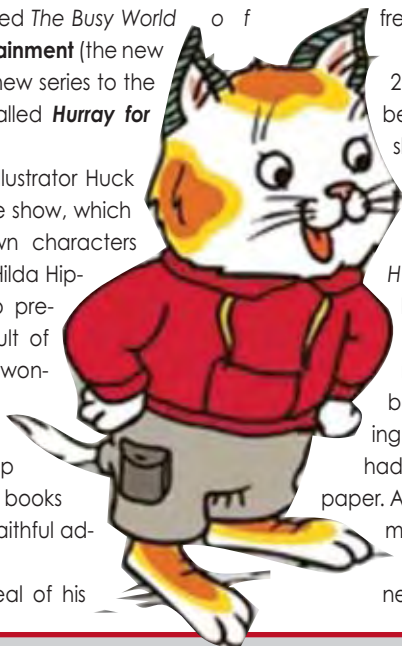
The great news is that Richard's son, illustrator Huck Scarry, is involved in the production of the show, which focuses on a tighter group of Busytown characters (Huckle Cat, Lowly Worm, Sally Cat and Hilda Hippo), with educational content suited to preschoolers. "Hurray for Huckle! is the result of Cookie Jar's desire to bring my father's wonderful characters back to the TV screen," says Scarry. "My own personal role is to sit in for Richard Scarry himself and to help writers and artists assimilate the spirit of his books so that the animated series truly can be faithful adaptation of his work and style."

When asked about the timeless appeal of his

father's Golden Book series, Scarry replies, "I have a little dictum which I sometimes apply to art: 'What is new is not always good, but what is good is always new!' I like to think that what my father created is very good indeed, and hence, it will probably never lose its freshness."

Producer Christine Davis says they decided to go the 2D digital animation route as the technique really is the best way to show Scarry's well-loved characters and showcases the simplicity for the target audiences of preschoolers. "The show teaches children that it's fun to find out the answers to life's puzzles," says Davis. "We all know that preschoolers ask a lot of questions and *Hurray For Huckle!* will bring these questions and stories to life."

Huck Scarry, whose name echoes one of the show's main characters, says that as popular as his father's books were, they were never regarded as literature during his lifetime. "But that never bothered him," he adds. "He had a tremendous amount of fun putting his characters on paper. And that is why we can get so much pleasure and excitement from them. His recipe was to create books that were fun and made you laugh while teaching you something new. The animated series should do just the same!"







# Secrets of the Seven Sounds



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Secrets of the Seven Sounds is a fully-animated fictional feature. Part fantasy, part adventure, part science fiction, part comic dissection with five very different heroes, Seven Sounds is a relentless roller coaster ride set in a futuristic society with contemporary language and values. Ancient design fuses with modern technology to give the film a rich, mythical and epic feel. The movie is based on an original story by Gotham Chopra, Sharad Devarajan and Jeevan Kang, and the feature will be on the screens in early 2008.

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## And You Thought Zits Were Bad!

What would a TV market be without a spanking new animated show from Andy Heyward and his team of aces at **DIC Entertainment**? Their latest offering is a curious series titled *I Was a High School Dinosaur!* We had to ask for some sort of explanation about this enigmatic show! "We know that boys are fascinated by the power and mystique of dinosaurs, so we've explored a lot of different directions," says Mike Maliani, DIC's CEO. "Finally we realized that one thing we've never seen is a story in which the humans actually become dinosaurs. And we thought, now THAT is an awesome and empowering concept!"



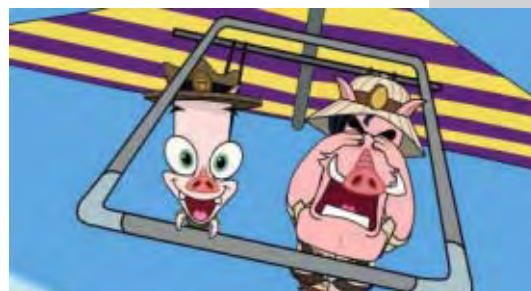
Maliani says the timing is perfect for the new 2D animated show. "Boys love dinosaurs, and there's nothing on the air right now that features them," he adds. "We're excited by the scripts and the way they blend comedy with action. The stylized look of the show, especially the depiction of the dinosaurs it's awesome!"

So what can we expect in terms of villains? "We have a villain who tries to accelerate Global Warming in his efforts to bring back the prehistoric era," says Maliani. "So we have a great forum to discuss environmental issues in a manner that's entertaining and meaningful."

Quick, someone get Al Gore to MIPTV fast.

## A Nature-Loving Piglet

When you're creating a show for kids, if you come up with funny names and character descriptions, you're half-way there! That's why we instantly warmed up to



**Iggy Arbuckle**, a Flash-animated toon about a nature-freak piglet and his best pal, Jiggers the beaver. Iggy and Jiggers are the stars of a new show produced by **Blueprint Entertainment** in assoc. with **National Geographic Kids Entertainment** and **C.O.R.E. Toons**. The fast-paced animated series has already been picked up by **Jetix Europe** and will be launched at MIPTV as a 26-parter aimed at six- to 11-year-old kids.

Created by Guy Vasilovich (*Hey Arnold! The Movie*, *Growing Up Creepie*), the show is very loosely based on the artist's own childhood growing up in rural Tomahawk. Blueprint asked writers Steve Wright and Myra Fried to pitch a story idea based on Vasilovich's designs, they delivered a bible and a few story premises, and the rest is natural history.

"One of the great thing about writing for the show is that Iggy, Jiggers, Zoop and Kira aren't your typical kid characters," says Wright. "They have a more advanced vocabulary, which meant that we didn't have to write down to kids. Someone said that the scripts are intelligently silly, and we think that's as good a description as any! Also the fact that the show promotes nature and the great outdoors makes it stand out. There's information to be gleaned from any given episode, but it doesn't hit you over the head."

## Bear + Giraffe + Rabbit = Good Times!

"There should be no right or wrong in a child's artistic creativity," says producer Maia Tubiana of **France Animation** and **MoonScoop Productions**. "We want kids to feel inspired and free in their artistic choices."

**Taffy Entertainment's** spanking-new animated series certainly reflects Tubiana's sentiments. Aimed at preschoolers, the 65x7 series is titled **Lamimila** and is based on original work by French author/illustrator Mila Boutan. Using simple 2D and cut-out animation, the show centers on the adventures of a cuddly bear (Teo), a charming giraffe (Ava) and a hyperactive rabbit (Riko) as they travel to far-flung spots around the planet.



"The show is born directly out of two children's creative play," notes Tubiana. "It's seemingly created in front of the viewers' eyes using a colorful assembly of all kinds of paper cut-outs."

Each episode will have a different setting and a different look and feel. Only the characters and the cut-out technique will continue from episode to episode."

The show's producers are emphatic that kids shouldn't watch *Lamimila* passively. "The show should engage kids and encourage them to use their own creativity and artistic talents." Uh-oh! Let's hope they don't decide to go crazy artistic with that thick black magic marker all over the new cream-colored sofa!



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## Global Treasure

**F**ive teenagers of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds set out on an exciting search for a mysterious treasure search in **ettaminA**'s new project **The Mundoo Hunt**. Launching both as a CG-animated feature and a multi-player online game, the project seeks to increase awareness of different cultures and promote understanding between different countries while offering viewers a rollicking great adventure.

"We think the biggest attraction of this property is the interplay between the culturally different characters," says ettaminA CEO Amit Anand. "Imagine putting together an all-time Olympics champion of Chinese origin against a mastermind mathematician of Indian origin. There are elements of cultural tolerance and team-play that we'd like to propagate not only to kids but also to audiences of all ages."

Based in Mumbai and Singapore, ettaminA is currently focused on IP development through creation of original animation projects. "At MIPTV, we plan to extend our creative content development program on a co-production model to international studios and creators," says Anand. "We'll also offer a worldwide partnership network for self/co-developed properties that have Asian—mainly Indian and Chinese—themes and an east-meets-west styling."

Anand believes that the world hasn't seen enough from the fast-growing economies of China and India. "We think 2007 will be the year where animation content based on Asian



themes will find a sizable international audience." That sounds great as long as those darn multicultural teens learn to share

## A New Animated Brooding Superhero

**W**hen we last spoke with **Toonz Animation Studio** CEO P. Jayakumar, he told us that his studio is busy on working on several high-quality co-productions with



Marvel, Hasbro and Paramount. "Our reputation of always delivering on time and exceeding expectations on quality is paying off," he says. "The fact that we're able to offer a repertoire of services, including development and pre-production in Los

Angeles, has given us a leg up in a competitive market."

Based in the electronic city of Technopark, Trivandrum (in the lush area of Kerala), Toonz offers a 18,000-square-foot state-of-the-art studio, staffed with top talent from various parts of the world, including the Philippines, Singapore, Canada, the U.S. and India. (According to NASSCOM, the Indian animation industry is estimated to hit the \$950 million mark by 2009.)

One of the most-anticipated projects in the Toonz pipeline is **Wolverine & the X-Men**, a new 26x30 series co-produced with Marvel Studios. The initial episodes are expected to be ready for worldwide distribute by this summer. First Serve Toonz will not only produce but will also oversee the creative direction of the series with Marvel. "We are excited about our production deal with Marvel. Kids everywhere love the rough-edged and rebellious Wolverine character, and the X-Men franchise brings a range of themes and characters that appeal to a global audience. This will be a groundbreaking deal for the Indian entertainment industry," says Jayakumar.



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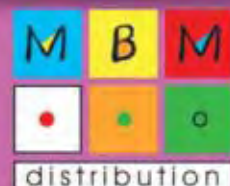


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## A Stop-Motion Spin on Reality Shows

**Y**ou can always rely on Adam Shaheen and his gang at Toronto-based **Cuppa Coffee** to deliver some eye-popping stop-motion projects at each TV market. This time around, MIPTV attendees can take a peek at **Life's a Zoo**, a 13x22 show that parodies the reality show genre. Yes, you get your usual reality show stock characters—the vain, the villainous, the meek, the manic, the jock and the I.Q.-challenged—as they do their best to backstab and compete to get to the “Top of the Food Chain.” The big twist here is that our players just happen to be a bunch of animals!



## Short and Sweet

**F**rench TV audiences have been basking in the sunshine of CG animator Pierre Coffin's universe since 2003. His much-loved characters Pat, the happy-go-lucky hippo and his buddy, the over-achieving and thoughtful dog Stan began their lives as French broadcaster TF1's gag-driven series of shorts. Last year, **Pat & Stan** starred in their own 22-minute special, and their performance of the old hit song “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” ended up as the 10th most watched video on YouTube!

At MIPTV, **TV-Loonland** will be shopping a package of 39x7 series starring the two best buddies, aimed at six- to ten-year-olds. To satisfy different market



niches, **Pat & Stan** will also be available as 200x30-second and 140x15-second formats. Co-produced by Paris-based vfx design studio Mac Guff, TF1 and TV-Loonland, the new show is estimated to be ready by mid-2008.

“What's so special about **Pat & Stan** is that it's a creator-driven show with hilarious character-driven comedy where the two friends take daily life situations to the extreme,” explains co-exec producer Olivier Dumont. “With our heroes, the smallest of events is likely to snowball into the biggest of catastrophes or to trigger the funniest gags!” Let's hope this show snowballs into a major success all over the place.

## Arrrrrgh, CG Pirates All Standing

**S**hiver me Timber-pants! A wonderfully inept trio of sea-dwelling pirates will be waving Entara's global domination flag at the market this year. Developed by London studio Blue-Zoo, the CG-animated **Those Scurvy Rascals** has already secured a worldwide deal with Nickelodeon and Nicktoons in the U.S., and kids will be able to enjoy the show in various territories this April.

“Given the flexibility of the show's format (it can be packaged as three-and-a-half, seven- or 11-minute segments with interstitials), it's ideal for broadcasters, mobile and multi-platform outlets,” says Regis Brown, Entara's exec VP. “I think the show has a very smart and flexible multi-media appeal.”

The cheeky show revolves around the antics of pirates

Sissy Le Poop, Smelly Pete and Shark Bait and their trusty parrot Polly as they search for pants, pants and more pants across the globe. According



to Brown, although the series is officially created for four- to eight-year-olds, it has a wider age target. “Scurvy has a wonderfully irreverent and slapstick sense of humor, so it can appeal to an older audience as well.”

Also helping the company win new friends at the market are a new 26x22 animated series called **Dex Hamilton: Alien Entomologist** as well as the BAFTA- and Emmy-winning worldwide hit **Jakers!**, whose rights have reverted back to Entara. Sounds like a good time to fill up our Blackjacks and Hogsheads with Bumboo and Grog, maties. (That's pirate slang for getting smashed and sloshed!) ■



# 3D Animation Visual effects



Zoé Kézako TV Series

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# Enter Saya the Vampire Slayer

The newest arrival on the [adult swim] block serves up a rich tale of bloodsucking fiends.

by Patrick Drazen

There's a new vampire in town, and the folks at Cartoon Network's [adult swim] block hope it will be as popular as their previous bloodsucking tale, *Trinity Blood*. Last month, the cabler began airing *Blood+*, a new 50-episode package that premiered in Japan two years ago. This acclaimed series expands on one of the most popular anime in recent times, *Blood: The Last Vampire*. In fact, the TV series is just one part of the *Blood+* franchise, which also includes two novels, three manga titles and a PlayStation game.

Created and written by Kenji Kamiyama (writer and director of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*) and animated by Production I.G., *Blood: The Last Vampire* ran less than an hour and was the only episode created of a proposed three-part anime. The story took place in 1966 at the Yokota Air Base, an American military installation near Tokyo. With American planes constantly running missions to and from Vietnam (making this one of the most symbolically political anime), the base was under siege by vampiric monsters called Chiropterans, who can disguise themselves as humans, live off of human blood and are almost impossible to kill. The only one who could stop them was a teenage girl named Saya, and the only effective weapon against the Chiropterans was a samurai sword. With its ex-

treme violence and blood, it was closer to *Kill Bill* than *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

*Blood+* is the directing debut of Junichi Fujisaku. He co-wrote two recent movies based on



CLAMP comics *Tsubasa Chronicle* and *XXX-HOLIC*. The show's chief animation director is Akiharu Ishii, whose credits include *Blood: The Last Vampire*, *The Prince of Tennis*, and the original *Ghost in the Shell*. Hans Zimmer (*The Lion King*) and Mark Mancina (*Brother Bear*, *Tarzan II*)

provide the show's effective background music. Animax, Sony's satellite television network first aired the series in Japan, and Sony Pictures Television distributes the series in the States.

The choice to program *Blood+* was simple, says Cartoon Network's spokesperson Courtney Palaski. She notes, "The series looks amazing, and we trust the people involved—it's a natural fit for Cartoon Network." Some of the finest work of Production I.G. has been broadcast on the network, including the co-produced series *IGPX* and both seasons of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. Despite the gruesome nature of the story (the blood starts seriously flying in the first 30 seconds), showing the series on [adult swim] will eliminate the need to edit the series. "We'll try to leave it intact," Palaski says.

*Blood+* builds a 50-episode TV series on the movie, with quite a few changes. The time is now present-day Japan, at another American military base. (This time in Okinawa, although characters comment on the many American planes leaving and returning to the base because of "the war.") Again the focus is on a teenage girl, Saya Otonashi. At first she seems more of a normal, rounded personality than her original Chiropteran-slaying namesake, but there are a few oddities in her life. For one thing, she can't remember anything that happened to her except the past year, when she was adopted by the Miyagusuku family: father George (an American Vietnam veteran), older brother Kai (like Saya, a standout athlete) and younger brother Riku. A mysterious American named David comes by occasionally and pays George for Saya's expenses. Dreamlike visions, which barely seem like part of Saya's past, include wanderings through an overgrown castle to a locked door. One day, everything starts changing when she encounters a curious street musician playing a cello...

With 50 episodes to work with, the story has been expanded to include a cast of almost 40 named characters. Their nationalities span the globe, from England to France to Vietnam, with many other stops in between. Like *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Witch Hunter Robin* and other anime epics, the series will work slowly and seriously to fill in the blanks with an elaborate saga spanning many nations over many years.

On Saturday nights (well, officially Sunday mornings) this spring, Cartoon Network will be the place to unravel the mysteries of *Blood+*. Don't forget the garlic. ■

**Blood+ airs Saturday nights at 12:30 a.m. on Cartoon Network.**





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## Double Exposure

SupperTime Ent. and Telescreen's new series *Alien Clones From Outer Space* promises to be a refreshing throwback to a kinder, gentler kind of TV comedy.

by Ramin Zahed

Storylines revolving around alien clones and mistaken identities involving twins have been floating around since Hollywood's black-and-white comedy classic era. Now, thanks to a wonderful new project hatched up by Los Angeles-based SupperTime Entertainment and Netherlands' Telescreen BV, kids will soon see a nicely designed traditionally animated series based on those successful elements.

Based on a popular book series by comedy



writer H.B. Homzie (*Saturday Night Live*, *The David Letterman Show*), the 53x11 show is called *Alien Clones From Outer Space*. It follows the adventures of 10-year-old twins Barton and Nancy Jamison, whose lives become more complicated when two alien clones end up living in their attic.

Last year, the show's exec producers Gerry Renert and Liz Stahler, whose credits include Mike Young Productions' Emmy-nominated *ToddWorld*, were introduced to animation veteran Chris Henderson by toon distributor Brenda Wooding (B Wooding Media). Hender-

son, who worked as associate producer on Disney's *Timon and Pumbaa* and *Hercules* TV series and the features *Return to Never Land* and *Clifford's Really Big Movie*, says he believes the show will appeal to a large audience both in the U.S. and overseas. While he's busy working on his upcoming CG-animated movie *Legend of Secret Pass*, he says he was very pleased to have met the SupperTime folks through Wooding.

"After meeting Chris, it took us about 10 minutes to decide he was perfect for us," says Renert. "He brings years of Disney experience along with a team of talents such as Woody Yocum, Terry Lennon and Alan Bodner. Also, the way Chris operates his virtual studio, we're able to keep overhead down which means more of the budgetary dollars show up on the screen. A lot of companies talk about creating a cost-effective 'virtual' studio, but Chris has been doing it successfully for a couple of years now."

So what was it about Homzie's books that really appealed to the producers? "To us, the show stands out because the material combines wonderful physical humor with such great classical comedy devices like mistaken identity and misinterpretation—the stuff of Shakespeare!—all which arise organically out of character and circumstance," explains Renert. He also believes that the show offers a great deal in the way of real-life wish fulfillment for children. He asks, "Who wouldn't want to



Chris Henderson



Gerry Renert



Liz Stahler

have their double take out the trash while they go skateboarding?"

The team recently wrapped a redesign of the show that gave the characters a fresher, edgier look. As Henderson points out, from the beginning, they decided the show would be better served in 2D. "Toon Boom's new Solo package proved to be the perfect paperless technology for us," says Henderson. "It's really a hybrid of hand-drawn and Flash-based animation, and its asset-saving qualities are really attractive to us. We can just e-mail the animations and set-up productions all over the world, from Ireland and Canada to overseas in

China."

Of course, having to animate two sets of twin characters on each show does have its share of challenges. "Differentiating between the twins and the clones was one of our big issues," says Renert. "We can't make the differences too obvious or the other kids in the series won't be believable if they don't pick up on them. So we have to rely on subtle posturing, expression and mannerisms. It's a process we're still refining, but our great directors like Terry [Lennon] and Brad Goodchild keep offering up creative new devices."

Luckily, the *Clones* team has a rich variety of "double trouble"-themed books and movies to go to should they need inspiration for their show. "Parent Trap and the [Michael Keaton feature] *Multiplicity* wonderfully dealt with the aspect of twins," says Renert. "Both *The Coneheads* and *Crocodile Dundee* humorously handled the 'fish-out-of-water' concept. But if *Alien Clones* has a lineage, it would probably include *I Love Lucy*, *Mork & Mindy* and, of course, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*."

It all kind of makes you wish more toons made references to Bill Shakespeare, Lucy Ricardo and Mork from Ork. ■

**Alien Clones from Outer Space will premiere in the fall of 2008. For more info., visit [www.suppertimentertainment.com](http://www.suppertimentertainment.com) or [www.telescreen.nl](http://www.telescreen.nl).**



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# The Mini Da Vinci Code!

Italy's Gruppo Alcini spins a charming animated tale based on the fictional life of the Renaissance artist.

by Ramin Zahed

**T**he lives and masterpieces of well-known artists have inspired numerous successful novels and Hollywood movies. Yet rarely do we see these famous characters brought to life in animated projects for children. Thanks to the folks at Italian toon house Gruppo Alcini, kids can now learn a few things about the fictional life of a young Leonardo Da Vinci in Florence. The Treviso-based company is offering a new 26x13" animated show titled *Leonardo*, which promises to be both fresh and entertaining and free of the clichés and formulas which often haunt biographical projects.

Created by brothers Sergio and Francesco Manfio, who are also behind Alcini's previous hit toons *Pet Pals* and *And Yet It Moves*, the 2D/CG-animated series mixes flights of fancy with real biographical background info about the Renaissance master. "I was looking for a typical Italian character who was well-known and appreciated worldwide and would appeal to kids," says Ser-



gio Manfio. "That meant I couldn't use Chianti wine or the life of [womanizer] Valentino! The idea of Leonardo came up automatically then, and it was very easy to create the cartoon character since the real Leonardo's creativity is very well understood by kids." He also points out that children seem to be fascinated by Da Vinci's inventions and observations about nature.

According to Francesco Manfio, Gruppo Alcini decided early on to center both pre- and post-production in Italy and in Europe. "Currently,

we are in the middle of production, and we have more than 60 people working at our Treviso headquarters," adds Francesco. "The animation service work is handled by our longtime partner DQ Entertainment in India."

Each episode of the series will find the young genius at work and trying to come up with ways to defeat the evil ways of his sworn enemy, Got-tardo, the rich son of the local lord who is also Leo's rival in love. Yes, they both have a soft spot for—who else?—the young Gioconda! Adding to the colorful cast of characters are our hero's faithful, but clumsy, best buddy Lorenzo, and the young Laura, who is torn between the forces of good and evil. And what would a kids' show be without a rapping robot named Tiglio, a trio of singing roosters and chickens, a sarcastic cat, a speaking horse and a wart-nosed witch!?

The Manfios are optimistic about the growth of the animation industry in Italy. Although the country hasn't been as active as some of the other producers in the region (mainly France, Germany, Spain and the U.K.), Francesco says there are several outfits that are producing strong, competitive products for the market. "A few good companies are working quite well," he notes. "Of course, there are still problems connected with fundraising—at the moment Rai Fiction is almost the only national co-production partner—but I'm optimistic about working with

parties such as Mediaset, Sky and others in the near future. Also, we are very close to creating an Italian agency for the support and development of audiovisual projects."

Now that *The Sopranos* has reached its final season on HBO, it's good to know that little animated Leonardo and his buddies will keep fans of Italian culture, humor and entertainment happy in the months ahead! ■

**For more information about Leonardo and the company's other toons, visit [www.alcini.it](http://www.alcini.it).**





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# The Popular Kids on Le Bloc

The growing hunger for multiplatform content and more sales to American outlets are changing the way French studios and distributors approach the TV production business. **by Ramin Zahed**

**Mais, oui**, it's official: You can now add animation as one of France's popular exports to the U.S. The country that invented fiber optics and leads the way as producer of luxury goods is going through a healthy renaissance period in animation. In 2006, a study showed that the U.S. became the biggest buyer of French programming—that's ahead of Italy, Germany and the U.K.

Much of this mini-boom has been brought about by the global success of shows such as Marathon's *Totally Spies*, MoonScoop's *Code Lyoko* and Fantastik Four, Xilam's *Shuriken School*, Method Films' *Skyland*. But if the recent edition of Cartoon Forum and this month's MIPTV market are any indication, we'll be seeing many more Gallic toons from newer indie players in the months ahead.

Marathon is bringing a new 52x26 CG-animated series titled *Monster Buster Club*. "The MBC is a secret club of alien-fighting kids," says David Michel, Marathon Animation's general manager, who co-created and produced the company's previous hit toons. "We pitch the show as 'Jimmy Neutron meets *Ghostbusters*!' as it blends fun daily life stories and secret alien-busting missions."

Michel warns that the 2007 climate may prove to be challenging for animation producers. "The U.S. market for acquisitions and co-productions with independents—U.S. or international—is on a downward trend," he believes. "Fortunately some European markets such as Italy and Germany are picking up again."

He points out that there's an interesting divide between the U.S./Canadian market, where the highest-rated shows

are pure comedies for six- to 11-year-olds and tweens, and the rest of the world, where the best scores are delivered by action-comedy shows and preschool toons. "For independent companies like ours, creating shows that can work in both markets can be pretty hard," Michel continues. "At the end of the day, it all comes down to finding a high concept that can travel well."

Another top player in the field is Futurikon, which celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. Under the leadership of CEO Philippe Delarue, the studio has had great success in the global field with two beautifully animated titles *Dragon Hunters* (a stylishly drawn 2D series which also has a CG-animated tie-in movie release this year) and *Minuscule* (a funny CG-animated series about insects straight out of *National Geographic* documentaries). With headquarters in Angoulême and Paris, the production and distribution outfit is producing a second 26-episode season of *Dragon Hunters* and is also working on a High Def 2D-animated series titled *Mini Problems*, *Max Powers*. The company also distributes the 26-part series *The Ugly Duckling and Me*, a co-prod with A. Film and Magma (in assoc. with M6, Disney France, TG4 Ireland and TV2 Denmark) as well as *Kaput & Zösky* (which airs on Nicktoons in the U.S.) and *Monster Allergy* (airing on Kids' WB! on The CW).

Mark du Pontavice and his team at Paris house Xilam also have a lot on their plates this year. Pontavice, who has had a good track record of selling French shows to the U.S. (*Stupid Invaders*, *Oggy and the Cockroaches*), is producing new seasons of *Shuriken*

*School* and working on a new feature adaptation of the popular graphic novel *Lucky Luke*. Also winning fans for the studio is *Rintindumb*, a charming 75x90-second 2D series about "the stupidest dog in the West!" Co-produced with France 3, the length and slapstick nature of the show makes it ideal for interstitial usage and the booming multiplatform market. *Rahan*, *Space Goofs* and *Ratz* are three of the shop's other shows that are performing well in some Euro territories.

"New technologies have opened a lot of doors for independent animation producers," du Pontavice said in an interview during the last MIPTV market. "We act both as producers and distributors in France, and I believe there are about seven or eight studios in this country that produce animated shows that can be exported for American outlets. French animation is going through a healthy period because we have a strong pool of talent, we know how to produce shows with less costs and overheads than the U.S. and our role as co-production partners has increased in recent years."

Thierry Rivard, managing director of Paris-based Kayenta Productions,



Christian Davin  
(Alphanim)



Thierry Rivard  
(Kayenta)



David Michel  
(Marathon)

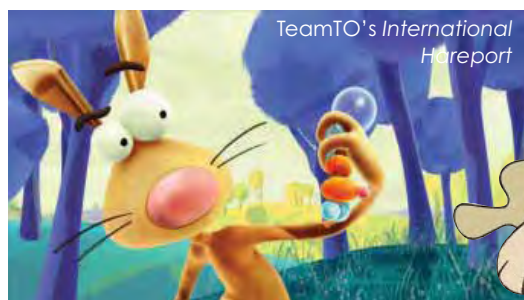
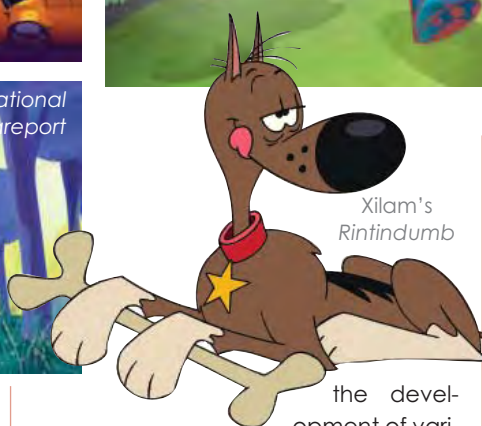


Guillaume Hellowin  
(TeamTO)



Marc du Pontavice  
(Xilam)



Alphanim's *Zombie Hotel*Futurikon's *Dragon Hunters*Kayenta's *Frankenstein's Cat*Marathon's *Monster Buster Club*TeamTO's *International Hareport*Xilam's *Rintindumb*

echoes du Pontavice's views. "The French industry is very much alive thanks to a combination of factors. On the business side, the CNC and new tax credits continue to sustain French content productions, along with the commitment of various TV stations—terrestrials, cable, satellite and digital," say Rivard, whose company pre-sold *Calamity Jane* to Warner Bros. in the U.S. over a decade ago.

"On the creative side, there has been

the development of various schools and the appeal of animation via different potential platforms which has attracted a new generation of talent. And on the production side, the sector has developed a higher profile and more professional approach."

However, Rivard admits that with the exception of very few specific programs and brands, nothing has been

overly convincing so far as a workable revenue stream for the new media platforms in France. "But the public are getting connected," he points out. "They are downloading and some are ready to pay. It's just a matter of time and figuring out the right way to approach the viewer."

Christian Davin and his team at Alphanim have been playing with various formats for a decade now. At this year's MIPTV, he will be bringing new seasons of the global hit *Robotboy* (which broke the hard-to-reach U.S. Cartoon Network barrier two years ago), *Galactik Football* (a co-production with France 2 and Jetix Europe) and *Zap Jr. High*, which chronicles the zany adventures of a group of teens at Barry Manilow High School!

"After years of regulatory consolidation and careful adjustments to the macro-economy situation—in some cases indie producers are able to raise from France only 40

to 60percent of production costs—which is quite significant considering the country's market size," says Davin.

"In order to find the balance of production financing outside France, indie producers have had to learn how to export their talent of French artists and authors and their awareness of the demands of the international market for exciting kids' properties."

Animated projects created solely for new media are still quite rare in France says Davin. "Made-for-TV properties include spin-off formats, from concept stage, in order to fit in new media platforms. Production costs for these additional formats are built in the series' production budgets (which are slightly increased)," he notes. "As far as Video



on Demand is concerned, it raises great hopes and promises a growing market. We should leave the build-up risk to industrial operations with global leverage!"

So what is high on Alphanim's to-do list in 2007? "Making shows kids like," responds Davin. "That and concentrating on money-rich media and sound business partners to share pains and profits!"

Also hoping to make shows that appeal to young viewers all over the world is toon veteran Guillaume Hellouin, who heads up one of the newest studios in Paris, TeamTO. At MIPTV, Hellouin will be offering two main projects, the second season of the award-winning preschool show *Zoe Kezako* (the High-Def series began its second season on TF1 last month) and *CDL International Hareport* (which was a hit at Cartoon Forum in 2006). He notes, "We also have two new concepts: *How to Drive Everyone Crazy* is a charming show about a little boy who intends to be a world-famous bug, and *Studio YOYO* offers frog songs on Demand—a preschool show which introduces kids to the various styles of music in funny way."

According to Hellouin, it's a healthy time to be producing animation in France. "There are a lot of new and young creators with fresh ideas, and the new regulations and especially the tax credit have boosted the industry," says Hellouin. "Although features can be more profitable, you have to catch the audience in a week and it's more uncertain. The TV business is much more predictable. For a TV series, it takes years to build a franchise."

Perhaps only sure-thing in the ever-changing and constantly morphing French TV toon scene is the unpredictable nature of what will appeal to a wider global audience. As Kayenta's Rivard reminds us, "Trends follow trends and tend to blend into one another, before changing direction. We've had a lot of comedy lately, so eventually we're bound to see more action. Short formats are becoming very fashionable through their multiplatform potential. So in the near future, we should be seeing some long-format specials; don't you think?" ■

## Angoulême, French Animation's Eclectic Epicenter

by Jean Thoren

**P**erched on the banks of the beautiful Charente river in Angoulême (in southwestern France, 83 miles from Bordeaux), are the busy offices of Magelis and the EMCA, Ecole des Metiers du Cinema d'Animation. I recently had the opportunity to tour this creative enclave with the EMCA's head of education, Christian Annau. There are 36 students in EMCA, which offers a two-year course on 2D animation and 16 enrolled at the one-year 3D program. Although some students opt for one or the other, the center also offers a three-year course which covers both animation techniques.

Annau pointed out that students are encouraged to immerse themselves in the entire animation process—from storyboard to layout to final execution. The courses are designed to allow students to develop a strong technical base while developing their creative talents. In order to receive their degrees, each student has to complete their own film, under the guidance of the program's top-notch teachers who use real-life projects and films in their classes.

Just across the courtyard from the EMCA are the headquarters for Magelis, the region's world-famous center which brings together authors and companies involved in visual media such as comic strips, animation, video games, vfx, Internet, multi-media), training centers and research facilities. There are ten specialized training centers in the region which provide hands-on training for students in the

fore-mentioned fields. According to Magelis president Michel Boutant, the program has seen the emergence and development of numerous top French projects, including award-winning features such as *Kirikou and the Sorceress*, *Kirikou and the Wild Beasts*, *U, The Triplets of Belleville*, *Asterix and the Vikings* and *Loulou and Other Wolves* and TV series such as *Funky Cops*, *Code Lyoko*, *Yakari*, *Totally Spies!* and *Cédric*.

Billed as the second largest production center of animation in France, Magelis includes over 100 companies, association and authors' collectives involved in the visual arts. Twenty of these businesses specialize in animation. The outfit also includes a *Maison des Auteurs*, the home base of beautifully outfitted studios, libraries and computer rooms for local artists.



Les Armateurs' *Bedtime Stories Competition* is one of the many French projects in production in the Angoulême region.

Throughout the year, Magelis offers invaluable forums and master classes focusing on issues central to and influencing the animation community at large. The impressive number of French animated TV and film projects in the global marketplace this year clearly reflect the benefits of Magelis' thoughtful, basic and continuing educational programs and services. For more info, visit [www.magelis.com](http://www.magelis.com). ■



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# ANIMATED SUCCESS STORY

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# The Beasts from Oz

A fresh creative voice from the great Aussie outback offers a new CG-animated series about a very funny farm. **by Ramin Zahed**

**A**lthough the subject of city animals adjusting to a new life on a farm may have been tackled before at the movies, perhaps nobody can do this theme more justice than Scott Strachan, the man behind the new CG-animated series *FARMkids*. A former elementary school music teacher, Strachan actually grew up in a remote part of the Australian outback. "We didn't have television coverage," says the charming idea-man from Oz. "I grew up surrounded by great bush characters who were unbelievable storytellers and influences."

Strachan says he used over 14 years of his education background to come up with the idea behind his new show, which is being distributed by Los Angeles-based PorchLight Entertainment at MIPTV this month. "The *FARMkids* were 'nurtured and raised' by myself in classrooms around Australia where they were adored by thousands of children during this period."

About four years ago, Strachan was approached by an American producer who saw the character designs at a retail store when he was vacationing Down Under. "He contacted me and made me an offer to turn the characters into an animated property," says Strachan. "I explored the idea, talked to studios in Australia, finalized a budget (had a heart attack!), raised all the funds from private investors myself and started to make the show!"

Aimed at six- to 11-year-old audiences,

*FARMkids* looks at what happens to a group of spoiled nursery petting zoo animals when they suddenly get relocated to the country and have to adapt to their new rustic lives! "You have a star-struck mutt, a sports-crazy bull, a power-tool-packing pig, a culinary goat, a tech-savvy horse, a lipstick-wearing cow and a duckling that can't swim or fly," says the ebullient Strachan. "The simple farm life gathers a new meaning when they have to defend their ranch against such things as giant alien tomatoes, monster pumpkins and out-of-control genetically engineered ninja corn!"

It didn't hurt that Strachan, a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, has performed with major symphony orchestras around Australia as a trumpet player and was instrumental in developing one of his country's most recognized music programs. He says he also has a love and passion for drawing and art from his father. "Although I have no formal training, I created and drew the original characters and developed every aspect of the 3D-animated characters and sets used in the show."

One of the strong selling points of the show is the fact that there's a *FARMkid* for every kind of young viewer in the mix. "They've been created to accommodate the passion of every child in the world—be it fashion, beauty, technology, cooking, inventing, engineering, singing, acting, etc.," explains Strachan. "I also wanted the characters to teach



Scott Strachan

tolerance to children, and this is very important in today's world."

Although the creative team is based in Brisbane, Australia, the production also has contract service studio contacts in India and China. "Being located so close to Asia, and the cost factor making large-scale animation studios unviable in Australia, we were the first large-scale production to create this type of production pipeline of creative management in the country."

According to Strachan, his team recently completed the first season of *FARMkids* and is working on the second batch of episodes. "We also have future series and a full-length movie in the pipeline," he says. "When I first started looking at developing the show, I investigated both 3D and 2D and felt the characters were better suited to the CG medium. However, I am looking at the use of some innovative formats combining 3D and 2D features."

So what does the enterprising man from the outback think of the whole animation scene he sees at the markets? "I didn't grow up with television or cinema," he points out. "Therefore I didn't see many of the animated classics until I was in my late teens and at university. I still have a lot of catching up to do, but this perspective does give me an element of freshness in my creativity! Today, I love shows like *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob* and *Jim-*



my *Neutron* and, of course, the Pixar movies. Mind you, I am discovering and enjoying great shows everyday, like Warner Bros.' *Road Runner* shorts for the first time on DVD with my young children!"

Well, mate, this business could certainly use a real unspoiled view from the great outback, and chances are those eclectic *FARMkids* are the ones to deliver it to the world. ■

**To learn more about the show, visit [www.farmkids.com.au](http://www.farmkids.com.au).**



# The Padded Cel

by Robby London



## On Strange Ways of Grabbing a Buyer's Attention

Sometimes it seems that people with good ideas don't have the funds to realize them. And people with funds don't realize their ideas aren't good. And people who have neither funds nor good ideas live in my house. (Did I mention that I live alone?)

With market season upon us—highlighted by MIPTV in Cannes this month—one might wonder how the former can best attract the attention of the latter. I know I'll regret putting the following in print—big-time!—but as someone who has been pitched regularly over the years, I've frankly been disappointed at the paucity of crazy, outlandish or colorful approaches taken with me. I confess I like gimmicks—if they're clever.

I once interviewed a writing team seeking their first animation job. I made a (typically inappropriate) passing joke about a LARGE bribe. The next day they sent me, as a thank you note, a 3' x 4' mounted poster of a check made out to me for \$2.73! It made me laugh, and it was imaginative (and visual) enough to get them a shot. (By the way, for the benefit of the Ethics Police, try as I might, I couldn't fit the check into the after-hours deposit slot at my bank.)

Another time, someone actually sent a six-foot-tall, remote-controlled metallic robot crashing into my office. That



*The Adventures of Jar Jar Binks: The Animated Series was one of Robby's earlier TV market discoveries.*

got my attention! Especially the broken furniture. And the robotic-hillbilly-voiced threat that I should prepare to "squeal like a cyber pig."

Last year at MIP, at a first-time meeting with a producer, he handed me a business card which opened. Inside, promoting his properties, was a custom-packaged promotional ... condom! I laughed and admired his audacity. He had, um, pricked-up my interest.

On the selling side, we've tried a few wild things ourselves. Once, when pitching a series called *Sergeant Kabukiman, NYPD* about a Kabuki-faced superhero (don't ask), we arranged for an actor, dressed in full kabuki costume to burst into our meeting at the network, interrupt our pitch and—in a manic flurry of screaming, grunting martial arts—pummel the stuffing out of plush dolls of the opposing networks' star characters. We got a develop-

ment deal—subject to cleaning up the office before we left.

So, the point is ... if you have a good gimmick or clever approach (pay careful attention to the modifiers: "good" and "clever"), it can help capture the attention of a buyer and help you stand out from the crowd. And that is the goal. After all, we are in show business. But caution: there is an impossibly fine line between clever and obnoxious. Or creepy. Or off-putting. Moreover, a

pitch gimmick alone is never sufficient. Once you've grabbed their attention, your pitch better be killer.

So what constitutes killer pitch technique? That is a topic for a book, not a column. But ultimately it boils down to being entertaining, personable, concise and empathetic. This mitigates against dullards, nerds, motor mouths and sociopaths. If you fall into any of these categories, give up pitching and immediately seek work as a columnist...

The last thing to remember is that creative prostitution is perfectly legal. If your goal is to get your show made, then be prepared to let the woman or man with the money "make sexy time" with your ideas. And when they do, learn to fake an orgasm. It always works at my house. And I live alone. ■

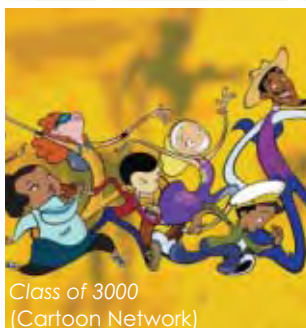
**Robby London is an animation industry veteran who was spotted wearing a green Borat-style swim suit at the MIP-COM market in Cannes last year.**



School for Vampires  
(Cartoon One)



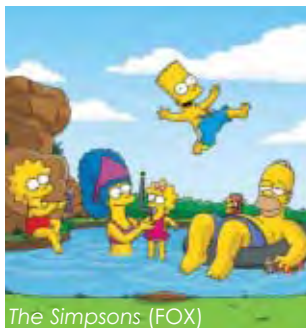
Minuscule (Futurikon)



Class of 3000  
(Cartoon Network)



Guide Dog (Bill Plympton)



The Simpsons (FOX)



The Imp (BRB)

# Ciao, Positano!

Italy's Cartoons on the Bay festival moves to Salerno, but keeps its usual dynamic agenda.

by Ramin Zahed

**T**here's no denying that attendees of the 11th Annual Cartoons on the Bay festival this month (April 19-22) may feel a bit homesick for Positano, the scenic seaside town which hosted the event for the past 10 years. However, fest organizer Alfio Bastiancich assures us that the new location, Salerno, is going to be just as *magnifico*!

"Cartoons on the Bay has grown significantly over the years with more than 700 delegates coming from all over the world," says Bastiancich. "Positano is an extraordinary place, but its lack of cinemas and a convention center became drawbacks. This year we'll have a large theater in Salerno and a beautiful convention center just a few meters away in Vietri sul Mare, one of the nicest locations on the Amalfi coast. We guarantee all our participants that the traditional charm of Cartoons on the Bay will remain intact, along with the excellent culinary traditions, hospitality and handcrafted souvenirs.

Besides spending their money on colorful ceramics, attendees will have a chance to check out the 25 TV series and specials that are in the running for the annual Pulcinella Awards in eight different competition categories. The number of participating countries is up to 30 from 2006 edition's 13, and they include productions from the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Croatia, Israel, Poland, Singapore and Taiwan.

"Those who will attend this year will not only have the possibility to view the best international productions of the year, but will also be able to learn more about them from the creators themselves," notes Bastiancich. "Judging from the projects showcased at the international panorama, there's an even more pronounced globalization, also on behalf of producers from the West who are also paying very close attention to the artistic styles and content of the Asian territories. There has also been an explosion of short-format productions (one- or two-minute shows) that have originated as TV fillers but are targeting the Internet and mobile phone markets. These series, some of which are very well-pro-

duced, are very different from the productions we saw on the Web until a few years ago."

Bastiancich also points out that Cartoons on the Bay is the only festival solely dedicated to TV animation which also serves as a meeting point for art and the industry. "The Pulcinella Awards are also the only prizes in the world dedicated to TV animation these are prestigious awards that everyone, from the majors to independent producers, strives to win because they are assigned by a prominent international jury."

Wolfgang Wegmann (Germany's WDR), Jan-Willem Bult (Netherlands' KRO Youth TV), Beth Gardiner (U.S.' Playhouse Disney), Celine Limorato (France 5) and Italian director Maurizio Forestieri make up this year's international jury. Among the many animated shows nominated for awards are *Charlie and Lola*, *Miss Spider's Sunny Patch Friends*, *Petpals*, *Peo Gallery*, *Santaprentice*, *Class of 3000*, *Growing Up Creepie*, *Ruby Gloom*, *School for Vampires*, *Minuscule*, *The Imp*, *Rintindumb* and *Starveillance*, *Ayakashi*, *Codename: Kids Next Door*, *Galactik Football*, *Oban Star-Racers* and *The Secret Show*.

This year's edition also features an animated short category. Up for a Pulcinella in this race are Bill Plympton's *Guide Dog*, Andre Carrilho's *Dinner in Lisbon*, Josko Murasic's *In the Neighborhood of the City*, Fish Wang's *The Man Who Makes Words* and Alice Bartolini, Valeria Pavin and Verena Trausch's *Wives Supermarket*.

According to Bastiancich, the event will also include a special focus on German animation. And wait, there's one other thing. "We are also planning to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *The Simpsons*, with some famous guests but I can't reveal them just yet!" D'oh! Just when we thought we had the full scoop on this awesome event! ■



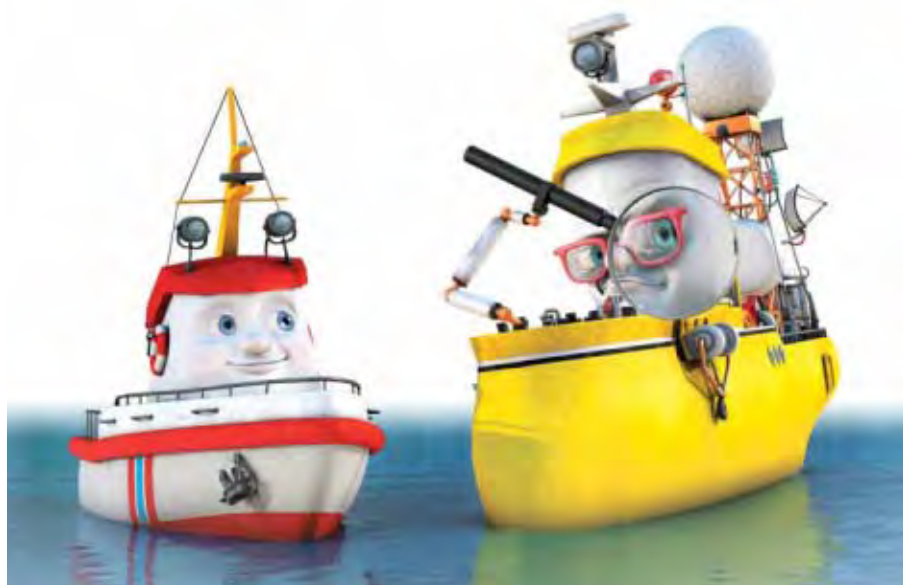
Alfio Bastiancich

For more info, visit [www.cartoonsbay.com](http://www.cartoonsbay.com).



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# The Little Boat that Could!

Norway's *Elias The Little Rescue Boat* is ready to take on the tough waves of the international TV market.

by Ramin Zahed

**H**e may remind you a little bit of Thomas the Tank Engine and Jay Jay the Jet Plane, but he's got a whole CG animation empire and international following of his own. The star in question is Norway's own *Elias The Little Rescue Boat*, the hit 26x10 series which has developed quite a following since its debut on the country's TV2 two years ago.

"TV2 has invested more than 16 million Norwegian kroner in the *Elias* series and feature film," says Beathe Anita Daae, producer and head of Norway's TV2 Junior children's programming. "It has become a leader among all the other high-quality series that we have on TV2. The show has, in a very short time, become a big hit among Norwegian kids and has meant a lot for TV2 Junior, in terms of attention from kids, parents and the press."

Produced by Oslo-based Filmkameratene A/S with the support of European Media Plus Program, the preschool show features a go-getting rescue boat and his team of pals—which includes all kinds of houses, boats, cars and even building cranes. Not surprisingly, the show was nominated for a prestigious International Emmy Award in 2006.

"The inspiration for the show came from a privately published book by Alf Knutsen and Sigurd Slattebrekk," says the show's producer John M. Jacobsen, an award-winning film and TV veteran, whose credits also include live-action movies such as the Oscar-nominated *Pathfinder*

(1987) and *Sophie's World* (1999). "They had always wanted to bring their story to the screen and struggled for over five years to make it happen."

That's when Jacobsen and his team at Filmkameratene came in and decided to make a couple of crucial changes. "We shared their enthusiasm and took over the project, making two important changes: switching from [remote-controlled] models and puppets to Autodesk Maya-based CGI and eliminating human beings from the story."

According to Jacobsen, a typical 10-minute episode costs about 700,000 Norwegian kroner (approximately \$100,000). "In Norway, we are fortunate to have government subsidies," says Jacobsen. "If we didn't, no feature film would get made—nor any major animation projects. With 4 million people, the market is simply too small. On the first season of *Elias*, the government paid 15 percent of the overall budget."

The producer also points out that high on the list of his team's priorities was to write stories that appeal to both children and adults. "Our model was the old Disney comic books in which Carl Banks created stories without writing down to children," says Jacobsen. "Sometimes they had dimensions that were too complicated for most children to fully understand, but they were still tremendously enjoyable because they opened the door to an adult world in a way children could appreciate."



John Jacobsen

While the producers are embarking on starting work on the second season of their series, they have already released a feature-length movie (*Elias and the Royal Yacht*) based on the show in Norwegian theaters.

"In the movie we touch on the subject of the tabloid press' near persecution of the famous! For the second season of *Elias*, we also take on important subjects such as oil spills and the environment, the problem with over-fishing and something most children have experienced—bullying! This may sound like heavy-handed preaching to some, but let me assure everybody that our first rule is to entertain."

Like many other animation pros working in the business, Jacobsen and company cite Pixar's toons as their biggest role models. "We set out to make a series that looks great," he notes. "I don't mean to say that we are even close to being as good as they are—they are our heroes, but I believe we have succeeded better than we could hope for—and the recent International Emmy nomination confirms it, I think!"

Of course, in a global market dominated by international conglomerates, it's a challenge to put a show from Norway in front of audiences all over the world. "We went into the market without any illusions," says Jacobsen. "I have never understood why Americans should have a near monopoly on proper marketing of their products. We developed a complete marketing strategy and an integrated merchandising program parallel to the production of the series. Our toy manufacturer tells us they have never experienced anything like the success of the *Elias* products. They expect to have 10 percent of the total toy market in Norway in 2007 relying solely on the *Elias* toy line!"

The busy little rescue boat should be the perfect ambassador of the region's burgeoning animation scene in the next few years. "When we embarked on this project we followed the policy we have lived with for more than 20 years in our company," says Jacobsen. "The fun is doing something new. With *Elias*, we faced the challenge of doing a major children's series in 3D, which nobody had really done on this level in Norway. Now our absolute priority is to see if we can make *Elias* succeed in the international market. We know we have something audiences like, regardless of where they live or what language they speak!" ■

For more information, visit [www.sfinternational.se/campaign/elias/](http://www.sfinternational.se/campaign/elias/)





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# Objects of Our Affection:

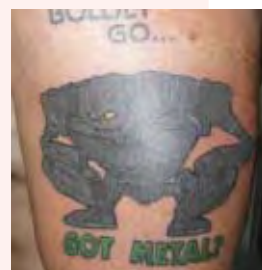
Brief news bytes from the world of licensing and merchandising.

## A Giant's Best Friend

**B**rad Bird's latest animated feature, *Ratatouille*, is high on everyone's must-see movies of the summer. But in another corner of the animation universe, a wonderful website is offering a vast collection of toys and collectibles from the director's much-loved 1999 feature *Iron Giant*. The brainchild of the movie's biggest fan Dave Zart, the nicely designed [www.ultimateirongiant.com](http://www.ultimateirongiant.com) website offers everything any true lover of the 2Dtoon could possibly wish for from model sheets, posters, promo material and artwork to stickers, books and DVDs.

"My venture began when I took my then-four-year-old daughter to a sneak preview of the movie a few days before it was released nationwide," he says. "I was completely taken by the beauty of the animation, the depth of the characters and the quality of the story and its message." His fascination led to the purchase of every *Iron Giant*-related item he could get his hands on. "It has now grown to 'obsession' proportions, but it brings me a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction!"

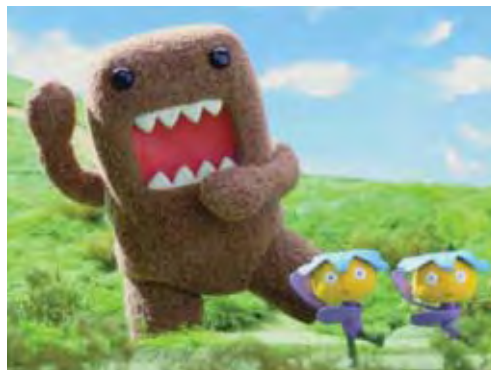
Dave has agents in over 20 countries all over the world who buy items for him. When we ask him about the most unusual items in his collection," he says, "That will have to be my license plates for my truck: FE GIANT [Fe is, of course, the atomic symbol for iron!] The *Iron Giant* tattoo on Dave's left arm also seems to generate a lot of attention and compliments! He says *Iron Giant* continues to be one of his all-time favorites. "If you don't get choked up at the end of the film when the Giant tells Hogarth, 'You stay, I go ... no following,' then you have no heart!" Thanks to good guys like Dave, now we all have a special



place to visit when we want to remember that amazing iron dude who visited our world.

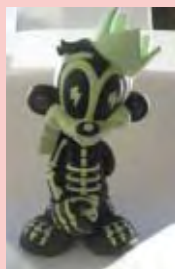
## Domo Domination

**I**t's hard to resist the not-so-subtle charms of the popular Japanese character **Domo**. The fuzzy brown cave-dweller first became a cultural icon when it was introduced as an icon for broadcaster NHK in 1998. Last month, it was announced that Domo will now be available in wallpaper, mobile video and vidscreen format thanks to a new deal made with mobile content provider **uclick**. Fans can now download all kinds of cell-phone accessories on [www.jamster.com](http://www.jamster.com) and at [www.gocomics.com/domo](http://www.gocomics.com/domo). If you like to have the little guy on your body, then you may want to visit a Hot Topic store near you or check out the goods at [www.domonation.com](http://www.domonation.com). Of course, the purists among us will be watching Nicktoons this fall Stateside and Nick Networks worldwide to catch the Domo animated shorts. A word of caution to the wise: the goofy dude likes listening to garage band music, enjoys seasoned beef with potatoes—and there's no other way to say this tends to break wind when he's miffed. Perhaps that's too much info!



## Going Bananas

**H**e's five inches tall, injection-molded, and made out of vinyl. He's also described as a two-bit hustler and no-good, dirty rotten rascal pimp! We're talking about **Billy Bananas**, a new collectible line launched by New York concept and design studio **INTERspectacular** (run by Michael Uman and Luis Blanco) and designer Tristan Eaton of **Thunderdog Studios**. The twisted figurines were unveiled at the New York Comic-Con in February, but a blind chase assortment set will be available this spring from [www.thunderdogstudios.com](http://www.thunderdogstudios.com). Uman, Blanco and Eaton first



came up with Billy when they were working on a wacky station ID for Comedy Central. "I've always had a fascination with the secret lives of cartoon characters," says Eaton. "I think they're just like us, but worse! They commit crimes, fall in love and sometimes vomit!" As Uman points out, "The creation of Billy Bananas into a figurine was a natural extension of our collaboration with Tristan." Blanco says it was all a case of reverse engineering. To find out more about this bitter pill, check out [www.interspectacular.com](http://www.interspectacular.com) or [www.thunderdogstudios.com](http://www.thunderdogstudios.com).

## When Ninjas Attack

**T**hose ninja-fighting teen turtles are getting some solid competition from the folks at **Xilam** and **Zinkia's Shuriken School**. Our sources tell us that the 26x30 CG/2D animated series, which follows the adventures of a group of colorful Ninja students, is continuing to build up its licensing lineup. The French show, which first aired on France 3 last July, will be making its U.S. debut on Nick later this year, as well as YTV (Canada), Disney Asia and Jetix throughout Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. Fans can already pick up *Shuriken School* stationary and accessories in French stores. ATM will offer school bags, cell phone holders, backpacks and pencil cases, while vid-distributor CITEL is releasing 26 episodes of the show in the fall. Hachette

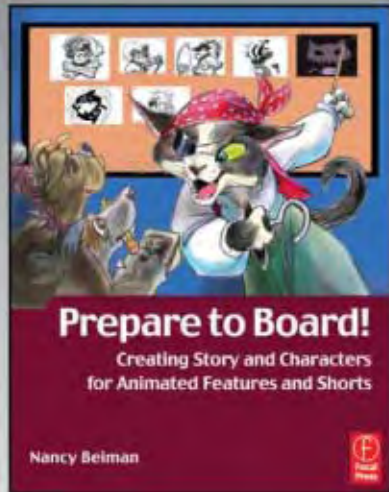


Jeunesse plans to flood the book market with 15,000 titles, and French clothing player FOPEM will make sure all the kids in the country ask their mamans to get them *Shuriken* pajamas and other cool outfits this summer. Enterprising agents should know that the luggage, master toy and video game licenses are still up for grabs!



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## Music for a Bright Tomorrow

Usually, when an anticipated animated feature hits the big screen, we search the stores and the far corners of the Internet to see what kinds of cool tie-in toys, gizmos and books are released in conjunction with the project. We were happy to

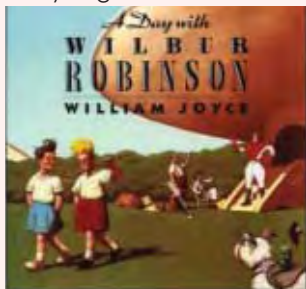


Danny Elfman

see that the movie has a cool soundtrack, composed by the supremely talented and prolific **Danny Elfman**. Out on the Disney label, the CD offers lots of catchy melodies which have a certain *Back to the Future* vibe. Elfman gets dreamy-eyed assistance from the likes of Rufus Wainwright and U.K. troubadour Jamie Cullum as well as pop radio favorites Rob Thomas, They Might Be Giants and '80s fave Kim Wilde. One reviewer described



Elfman's score as "supercharged by a manic energy that seems equal part *Simpsons*, Bernard Herrmann and Carl Stalling." Now that sounds pretty darn good to us! Of course, if you need to get your hands on some timeless art, you can check out the movie's source of inspiration, William Joyce's beautifully illustrated book, ***A Day with Wilbur Robinson*** (\$6.99). Seriously, the future never looked better.



## Cool Collectibles to Come

The following are some of the most anticipated new items on the Entertainment Earth toy and collectible website (3/15/07):

- The Big Lebowski The Dude Bobble Head (Bif Bang Powl, \$12.99)
- Star Wars Internet Exclusive Republic Commando Delta Squad (Hasbro, \$33.99)
- Transformers Bumblebee Bust (Diamond Select, \$49.99)
- Flash Gordon The Movie Flash Bobble Head (Bif Bang Powl, \$12.99)
- Lord of the Rings Sam in Orc Armor Mini Bust (Gentle Giant, \$49.99)
- Marvel Universe Civil War Thing Bust (Diamond Select, \$54.99)
- 300 Series 1 Action Figure Set (Neca, \$209.99)
- Barbie 1970s Cher Doll (Mattel, \$39.99)
- McFarlane Dragon Set No. 6 (McFarlane, \$27.99)
- Farscape DRD Plush (Toy Vault, \$24.99)



300 Series I from NECA

## HIT Spreads Fairy Wings

Now that London-based **HIT Entertainment** (home of Kipper, Barney and Thomas the Tank) has acquired worldwide rights from Working Partners to the popular girls' publishing property **Rainbow Magic**, you can also expect a new line of consumer products, more books and, of course, a TV series featuring the very un-Bratz-like heroines. Introduced in the U.K. in 2003 and aimed at girls 5-to 9-years-old, Rainbow is a collection of more than 60 books that follow the adventures of Kirsty and Rachel and their interactions with different groups of fairies and other creatures in Fairyland. To date, Rainbow has sold more than 10 million volumes worldwide.

"The property's wholesome,



magical and creative vision captures a child's imagination and perfectly complements our existing portfolio," says Bruce Steinberg, CEO of HIT Entertainment. HIT says it plans to work closely with the creators of Rainbow, Working Partners and publishers in each territory to develop new content for the property. Not surprisingly, Disney's Tinker Bell was not available for comments. ■



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# Tech Tools That Makes Them Tick!

by Ellen Wolff

**T**oday's vfx supervisors and CG animators are very particular about the software they use. They've also got definite opinions about the present media landscape. In time for the NAB tech confab in Vegas this month, we asked experts from ILM, PDI/DreamWorks, WETA, Animal Logic, Sony Imageworks and The Orphanage to choose their favorite software tools, and share advice on impressing potential employers. Collectively, they provide a snapshot of the current creative environment, and they illustrate what it takes to succeed.

## Tim Alexander

VFX Supervisor, Industrial Light & Magic, San Francisco

**Credits include:** *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *The Perfect Storm*, *Star Wars: Episode One*. **Latest assignment:** *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

**Favorite software:** Apple's Shake and ILM's proprietary Comptime. "I come from a compositing background and do my best to composite shots as often as I can."

**Favorite animated character:** Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy*. "I grew up in Hawaii watching *Kikaida*, *Ultraman* and *Astro Boy*. I love the aesthetic of the character and the quirkiness of Tezuka's designs and stories."

**Most anticipated movie:** "*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, of course! It sounds corny to be looking forward to a movie you're working on, but I enjoy finishing a project and then seeing it with an audience."

**Favorite website:** [www.funagain.com](http://www.funagain.com) "Funagain has a huge stock of hard-to-find board games. There are hundreds—if not thousands—of far more complex games than Monopoly. Try *Settlers of Catan* to get a sense of how different board games can be."

**Never misses:** *Battlestar Galactica*. "The story line is intriguing and the vfx are great. I hope this is the way TV shows are going."

**What his iPod is tuned to:** "Podcasts, and lots of them. The *FX Guide* podcast is an excellent source for vfx-related information."

**Advice to job seekers:** "Don't be above taking an internship if you have no experience. Internships are great ways to learn from experienced people and to build important relationships that will ultimately help you to progress in the industry. I interned at Disney for two years and loaded tapes for a year. I broke a lot of stuff since I didn't know what I was doing, but I still know the people I met during that time, and the experience was invaluable."



## Don Ezard

Animation Supervisor, Animal Logic, Australia

**Credits include:** *Happy Feet*, *Moulin Rouge* and the Aussie music movie *Garage Days*. Currently doing character design for "Several films in development."

**Favorite software:** Avid's Softimage. "It has great versatility, particularly for facial and lip-sync work."

**Favorite animated character:** "There are too many to list, but any character that makes me fall about with laughter."

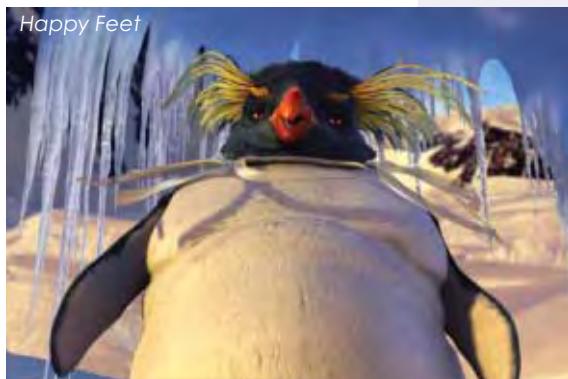
**Most anticipated movie:** Pixar's *Ratatouille*.

**Favorite website:** Google

**Never misses:** BBC's *Planet Earth*, Australia's *Late News* and *Sports Tonight*.

**Annoying catch phrase of the moment:** "Are we done?"

**Advice to job seekers:** "Include your artwork or photography in your demo reel. Keep it short, and focus on examples of what you do best."







## David Gould

Technical Director, WETA Digital, New Zealand  
Founder, David Gould Studios, Australia



had this for lighting King Kong!"

**Credits include:** *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* and *King Kong*. Currently working on the 3D-CG short, *Awaken*.

**Favorite tools:** Autodesk's Maya, Adobe's Photoshop and NVIDIA's Gelato. "In a world where you spend 80 percent of your time finessing the last 20 percent, Maya is the tool of choice. The devil is in the details and Maya allows me to write plug-ins and scripts to get the last 20 percent that makes the renders really shine. My favorite graphics package of all time is Photoshop, for sheer simplicity, stability and power. Gelato is fantastic for doing near-real-time lighting; its Sorbetto tool allows you to move lights and modify them interactively. If only we'd

**Favorite animated character:** Baloo from Disney's *Jungle Book*. "He was amazingly animated. It is great to see a character imbued with such warmth while demonstrating all the faults of a real person."

**Most anticipated movie:** "Without a doubt, 300!"

**Favorite website:** [www.cgportfolio.com](http://www.cgportfolio.com). "I love seeing the hand-painted work (albeit via a Wacom tablet) of traditional artists."

**Never misses:** *Prison Break* and *Lost*.

**What's playing on his iPod:** Armin van Buuren and Radiohead.

**Catch phrase he hates:** "The use of the word 'synergy' with everything. I thought that word would fade with time, but some people still think it's hip."

**Advice to job seekers:** "It's a long road to realizing your dreams so be prepared to hunker down and put in long hours—sometimes for low pay. If you have a real passion you'll make it in the end."

## Corey Rosen

Creature Supervisor,  
The Orphanage, San Francisco

**Credits include:** Worked on *Night at the Museum*, *Terminator 3* and the South Korean creature-feature, *The Host*. Latest assignment is *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*.

**Favorite software:** Maya. "I'm excited about Maya 8.5's addition of Python Scripting to expand our custom script and plug-in development."

**Favorite animated character and also his most anticipated movie:** "*The Host*, naturally!"

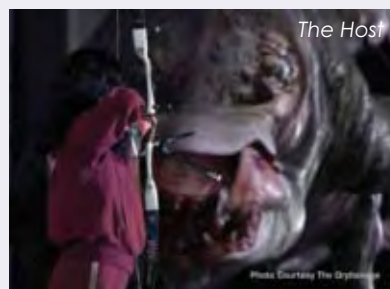
**Favorite website:** [www.rebelsguide.com](http://www.rebelsguide.com), a DV rebel site from The Orphanage co-founder Stu Maschwitz.

**Never misses:** *Heroes*, *Saturday Night Live* and *Project Runway*.

**Currently has an iPod tuned to:** "The podcast *Scene Unseen* and the AFI short, *Family Attraction*."

**Most annoying trend:** "Tube tops and clogs."

**Advice to job seekers:** "Pleasant Persistence Wears Down Resistance."



## Suzanne Slatcher

Technical Director, Pixar Studio

**Credits:** *Ratatouille*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, *Finding Nemo* ... and many, many commercials!

**Currently working on:** "A future Pixar film that has not yet been announced."

**Favorite software:** "The software doesn't matter—it's not what you've got, it's what you do with it."

**Favorite animated character:** "I love Daffy Duck and I love a good villainess: Yzma, Cruella...cheekbones and attitude."

**Most anticipated movie:** "*Ratatouille*, of course!"

**Favorite Web Destination:** "Flickr for endless visual inspiration and time wasting."

**Never miss TV shows:** "I'm English and I really miss proper English telly. So on imported DVD, I watch *Nathan Barley*, *Peep Show* and *Russell Brand*."

**Things on my iPod:** "I'm one of the few people left in the world who still doesn't have an iPod. However, on my stereo right now is Antony and the Johnsons."

**Annoying catch phrase of the moment:** "The word healthful."

**Advice for job seekers:** "If you're still in school concentrate on doing one thing well. If you're just starting out, work at a small company. Arrive early, stay late, and learn everything. Enthusiasm will get you farther than confidence, but be bold. And be nice to everyone, it's a very small world."





## David Schaub

Animation Director,  
Sony Pictures Imageworks, Los Angeles

**Credits include:** *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; *The Polar Express*; *Stuart Little 1 and 2*; *Cast Away*. **Current project:** Sony Animation's *Surf's Up*.

**Favorite software:** "Maya has become the animation industry's tool of choice. However, in the end it only matters how you apply the tools that you use (whatever they might be). I'm sure there are many other options out there, including pencil and paper—which served the industry well for many years."

**Favorite animated character:** "There are so many that it's hard to settle on one. The characters in *The Jungle Book* are great across the board, especially the work that Milt Kahl did on Shere Khan. I also have a soft spot for the characters in Disney's *Aristocats*. The execution and believability of those performances are genius. They inspired me to become an animator."

**Most anticipated movie:** "300. The comic-book look is very cool, and it seems that the effects were achieved through some pretty revolutionary techniques."

**Favorite website:** YouTube

**Never misses:** "SpongeBob—only because I have no choice. My daughter is always watching."

**Uses his iPod:** "For lots of audio books lately."

**Most annoying catch phrase:** "My Bad. To me, it's like fingernails on a chalkboard."

**Advice to job seekers:** "Keep your reel simple, with only your best work—not all of your work. You only have a few minutes to grab the attention of the reviewer. Put your most recent work up front, and make sure your reel contains only your own work unless otherwise noted. For an animation reel, focus on the acting—on emotion rather than motion. (There was a time when a good walk cycle could get you a job, but those days are long gone!) The reels that get noticed are the ones that make us laugh for the right reasons. Dark, moody or sad pieces do not have the same impact. Humor is what we remember, especially since comedy is harder to execute. We know that someone with great comedic timing can execute a 'dark' piece if asked to do so, but I wouldn't bank on the other way around. And that kick-ass soundtrack? Forget it. Lose the magic, especially if it plays over dialogue! Last, fancy packaging does not help your reel stand out in the pile. Solid, relevant content is all that matters."



## Andy Wheeler

Senior FX Artist,  
PDI/DreamWorks Animation, Redwood City, California

**Credits include:** *Shrek 2*, *Madagascar*, *The Madagascar Penguins in a Christmas Caper*.

**Most recent project:** *Shrek the Third*.

**Favorite software:** "I love our proprietary particle renderer and scripting tools. They're really fast and versatile. We also used Maya Fluids a great deal in *Shrek the Third* for flames and smoke, as well as Maya's conventional particle tools."

**Favorite animated character:** "Feathers McGraw, from Nick Park's *The Wrong Trousers*. He had practically no facial movements yet managed to be an incredibly expressive and sinister character."

**Most anticipated movie:** "Why, *Shrek the Third* of course! Ahem ... I'm also looking forward to Simon Pegg's next film *Hot Fuzz* and Michael Bay's *Transformers*."

**Favorite websites:** Dark Horizons, Cartoon Brew and Gizmodo.

**Never misses:** *Heroes*, *Lost*, *30 Rock* and *The Office*.

**Playing on his iPod:** Weekend Players, Zero 7, Scissor Sisters.

**Most annoying trend:** "Wannabe famous heiresses."

**Advice for job seekers:** "On your show reel, omit any fantasy girlfriends, especially if they are chrome, well-endowed robots!" ■







## Cause and Effect

# The *Wind* Beneath Their Wings

The careers of two young filmmakers take flight thanks to a well-crafted CG-laden short about a WWI fighter pilot.

by Barbara Robertson

A unique 11-minute student film from Brigham Young University breezed into the spotlight at the Sundance Festival this year. Writer/director D. Kohl Glass's *Der Ostwind* (The East Wind), one of 71 short films aired from 4,445 submissions, tells the story of a WWI fictional German ace who flew in many battles and earned many medals, all too easily.

As the film opens, the pilot has resigned himself to a purposeless fate. And then he meets an American pilot of extraordinary skill. Cinematographer Travis Cline filmed actor Patrick Rosier playing both pilots. Nearly everything else—the planes, the clouds and the landscapes below—is created in CG. The effect is like a cross between a live-action graphic novel and an early newsreel.

In fact, when Glass began the project five years ago, he intended to create a 2D animated short. He approached the BYU animation department, but they already had a 2D film in the works. Because Glass left BYU to spend time with his fiancé in Arizona, he shelved the project. He returned to BYU, but rather than pursuing *Der Ostwind*, he made a live-action film, the award-winning short *The Promethean*. Even so, *Der Ostwind* didn't fade away.

During his senior year at BYU, Glass showed the script to his screenwriting instructor Darl Larsen. "He loved the script, but not the ending," he says. In that ending a chimpanzee sat in the pilot's seat of the American plane. "My friend and I had read *The Right Stuff*," he explains, "and we thought it would be funny if monkeys had been involved in every aspect of aviation. But my screenwriting teacher said I had cut the feet off a dramatic script with a ridiculous ending. I learned a lot about screenwriting at that point." Rather than making the beginning funny, Glass changed the ending and Larsen pre-

sented the project to the animation department again.

This time, professor Kelly Loosli suggested filming an actor, compositing the live-action footage with CG planes and backgrounds, and giving the result a 2D look using a rotoscoping process like that in *Waking Life* rather than producing a 2D animation. And thus, three years ago, with the help of some grants, Glass began working on his film at last.

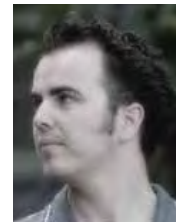
He ran into his first kink in the animation department. The animators didn't want anyone to illustrate on top of their work. "If they were able to make something that matched live action, they didn't want it swept under the carpet and blanketed with filters," says Glass. "They wanted the actual CG to be untouched for their reels." Glass agreed that if they could create a photoreal plane and CG world, he was willing to do the film in 3D. They convinced him they could. "I was doing 2D only to blend the live action and CG anyway," he says.

Meanwhile, the animation department began working on the CG planes and backgrounds. And then, one day Glass walked into a computer lab and saw Rob Au sitting in front of a computer modeling a World War II airplane. When Kohl described his film, Au signed on. "I had dabbled in Maya, so I started re-doing some of the particle effects and Kohl liked them," he says.

It was a heaven-sent match. "In a short time, Rob was spearheading the project," says Glass. "He handled everything." Au became animation director, and also supervised or worked on nearly every aspect of the production. When Au arrived, the animation and rendering, all done in Maya, leaned toward photorealism. "It was still stylized," he says. "The big emphasis was on getting it done because there wasn't a lot of student manpower."



Kohl Glass



Rob Au

Au had a different vision. "I had the idea of taking the project beyond where it was," he says. "I became passionate about it kind of consumed me." Working with Shaun Graham and Mark Christensen, they rebuilt all the planes to add more detail to the models and rendered the models with RenderMan rather than Maya. When Au began the project, he estimated finishing in three to four months. Instead, because of changes he championed, he spent his entire junior year and half his senior year

working on it. In addition to learning Maya, Au wrote shaders in RenderMan and composited in Shake. "It was a huge learning experience," he says. "I didn't have much computer background because I had been focusing on hand animation."

A studio-based animation class helped him animate the planes. "Shaun set up procedures using expressions and Mel scripts so everything was automated," Au says. "We grouped the models under one locator in Maya that had a bunch of controls."

Some of the older BYU students helped with rendering. "We wanted the flexibility of RenderMan to handle displacements and bump maps," Au says. "And we wanted to have RenderMan experience to help us get jobs."

For particle effects and clouds, though, Au stayed with Maya. "I didn't have a big enough handle yet on RenderMan to do volumetric shaders," he says. For compositing, he learned Shake and completed 100-plus shots for the film.

Glass edited *Der Ostwind* in Final Cut Pro, adjusting the colors as he worked. "I had one setting that I used to pull the color for each shot," he says. "Everything is muted." But not the reaction to the film. In addition to Sundance, *Der Ostwind* premiered at the Philadelphia Film Festival and won best action-adventure film at Comic-Con. The film was invited to WonderCon and Glass plans to continue showing it in other festivals. His dream, though, is to turn *Der Ostwind* into a feature; however, that might have to wait. "A lot of people have become interested in me since Sundance, and I have two scripts to show," he says. "One could be an independent film; the other perhaps a small studio film."

As for Au, he leveraged his *Der Ostwind* experience into a stint in the lighting department at Rhythm & Hues, where he worked on *Night at the Museum*. "Originally, I wanted to be a traditional character animator, but I loved compositing and lighting on *Der Ostwind*," he says. "I loved having really good people behind me and putting together the final image. That's what *Der Ostwind* taught me."

It certainly seems that for these two promising young filmmakers, *Der Ostwind* is a good wind that blows no ill. ■

Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in visual effects and CG animation. If you have suggestions for her columns, you can e-mail her at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net).

## The Best of NAB 2007:

# A few pointers about the electronic media pow-wow in Vegas this month.

For tech-savvy media fans, spring doesn't officially kick into high gear until April 14 when the National Association of Broadcasters takes its show to Vegas. Although the actual exhibits begin on the 16th, there are plenty of activities planned to keep electronic media players busy all week. FCC heavyweights Michael Copps, Jonathan Adelstein and Deborah Taylor Tate are scheduled to speak on the 17th, and Meet the Press news-making journo Tim Russert and veteran deejay Rick Dees are both receiving career awards. We asked some of the animation and vfx-related companies to share their NAB news with us. Here is a handpicked selection of what they're bringing to the event:

### Adobe's Do-It-All Package

What do you get when you put all of Adobe's cool releases together in one giant do-it-all professional package? The result is Adobe's spanking-new **Production Premium** release, which will be unveiled at the con-fab. "NAB has always been an important platform to showcase Adobe's latest products," says Simon Hayhurst, director of product management for Dynamic Media.



Combining its After Effects CS3 Professional, Premiere Pro CS3, Photoshop CS3, Soundbooth CS3, Encore CS3 and OnLocation CS3, Adobe's Production Premium promises to have everything professionals need for capturing, editing, creating fx, compositing, interactive authoring and delivering output for their post-production projects. There's tight integration among the product's new video, audio and design tools and the increased productivity that comes from the suite's unified interface and the smooth workflow it offers by being available on both Mac and Windows.

For more info, visit [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com).

### Autodesk Files Extensions

If you've been waiting for new extensions for your favorite Autodesk vfx, finishing and color-grading solutions, then you'll be happy to know that your wait will be over at NAB. Maurice Patel, director of product marketing at Autodesk, tells us the company will be unveiling



new extension releases for **Inferno**, **Flame**, **Flint**, **Smoke** and **Lustre**, as well as featuring the most recent releases of the hot trio of **Toxik**, **Maya** and **3ds Max**!

"Since projects are getting increasingly complex as clients want to do more and more for their dollar, we will also show new productivity and performance enhancements," says Patel. "We'll also demonstrate improvements in conform, a core differentiator of our solutions in its ability to conform equally well from any off-line source, be it Avid or Final Cut Pro."

According to Patel, NAB is one of the most important industry events on the global calendar. He adds, "My primary reason for going is to dialogue with broadcast and post-production professionals attending and to share Autodesk's vision and strategy with them." Besides catching David Hasselhoff in the new Vegas production of *The Producers*, of course!

For more info, visit [www.autodesk.com](http://www.autodesk.com).

### Workstation Elation

By now, you've probably read about the new **3DBOXX RTX** series workstation or know someone who's working on it. At NAB, you'll be able to see demonstrations of the wonder product's demonstrations at the ProMax Systems booth. The workstation can be used on either Dual-Core or Quad-Core processors and houses up to 15 data drives for up to 1GB of peak read storage bandwidth, which means your typical editor will have a workflow faster than Speedy Gonzales.

As Francois Wolf, BOXX's director of marketing explains, "This is the first time we've publicly demonstrated how the new workstation, combined with ProMax's video systems integration capabilities, provides break-

through workflow improvements when running high-end video editing applications such as Adobe Premier Pro. RTX's large hard-drive capacity (up to 15 drives) achieves high read and write speeds suitable for work with 2K material.

When we ask Wolf to give us his favorite tech tool du jour, he says, "This is hard to call because BOXX systems integrate many top-of-the-class technologies. Intel's Quad-Core Xeon is certainly a keep technology right now, as well as the latest NVIDIA Quadro FX 4600 professional-class graphic cards." If you feel the need for speed, this is the demo you won't want to miss!

For more info, visit [www.boxx.com](http://www.boxx.com).



### Rendering Revolution

Artists and technicians who have a taste for creating cool 3D projects are already familiar with the myriad capabilities of **Luxology's modo** software. At NAB, the company will showcase its latest "point" release, **modo 203**.

"Modo is a unique fusion of modeling, painting and rendering that provides a superior workflow for artists," says Brad Peebler, president and co-founder of Luxology. "We believe that getting the details right is as important as having killer features. So we have put a huge effort into an intuitive user interface and very rapid response in the viewports. On the feature side, our renderer is extremely easy to get great results from, and our UV editing



Rendered by modo 203 by Chris Cousins.



tools are top-notch. Then there is our modeler!" We pressed Peebler to tell us about his favorite tech toy of the moment, but he loves keeping secrets! "My new workstation ... I just can't tell you more about it yet!"

For more info, visit [www.luxology.com](http://www.luxology.com).

## Storyboarding as a Lifestyle Choice

When we interview animators and production companies in these pages, **Toon**



**Boom's** name comes up as often as artists like to compare themselves with Looney Tunes masters or Pixar. Not surprisingly, the Montreal-based provider of top animation solutions will have a huge presence at NAB as it brings its killer Storyboard release to Vegas.

"We want to introduce Toon Boom **Storyboard Pro** as the only storyboard tool for film, documentaries, animation, gaming and scientific presentations," says the company's marketing director, Karina Bessoudo.

Among the hot new solution's features: Flexible motion-layer based panel display with dynamic camera capabilities, a complete set of drawing tools (including a pressure-sensitive brush tool when using a digital graphic tablet and pen), customizable caption fields to insert fully searchable textual content, and extensive import and export capabilities, including printing with Harmony/Opus/Solo, EDL, AAF, PDF, PSD, SWF, AI, JPG, TGA, PNG and Quicktime file formatting. Phew! With all these amazing bells and whistles, the real question is who can *not* afford to add Storyboard to their workstation?

For more info, visit [www.toonboom.com](http://www.toonboom.com).

## Wiley Texts Will Set You Free!

As you're wandering the super-crowded aisles of the NAB confab, you may feel an overwhelming anxiety attack about all the new tech software on the market. How is a poor artist supposed to master all these tech gizmos? We have four different solutions to this problem—four new easy-to-read and digest texts by



the folks at John Wiley & Son. **Introducing Character Animation in Blender** by CG expert Tony Mullen walks readers through the fascinating world of the free, open-source animation alternative, offering tips on installation for Windows, Mac and Linux. The companion CD includes the first "open source" movie *Elephants Dreams* directed by Bassam Kurdali, as well as software such as Audacity, VirtualDub and Inkspace, and all kinds of cool project files which accompany the book's tutorials. The 495-page tome and companion DVD can be yours for \$39.99.

Two other must-haves for CG pros and hobbyists are Lee Lanier's **Maya Professional Tips and Techniques** (\$39.99) and **The 3ds Max 9 Bible** by Kelly L. Murdock (\$49.99). Both volumes demystify the CG process and offer timesaving tips and effect step-by-step tutorials and companion digital supplements. If you want to work smarter and more efficiently in your medium of choice, these are the essentials primers for you!

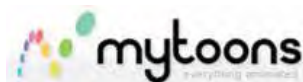
We also love the description of Eric Keller's great new tome **Maya Visual Effects: The Innovator's Guide** (\$39.99 plus CD). "This full-color Maya Press title takes a MacGyver-type approach, where readers learn how to create vfx and solve animation problems as if they were tied up in a basement with a computer with Maya installed as the sole solution to set them free." Come on, now. Can you think of a better way to spend a rainy weekend indoors?

For more info, visit [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

## Share Your Toons, Dude!

What does an animation web community modeled after YouTube and MySpace look like? If you're interested in the future of animation on the Web and searching for the next step in the evolution of toons, you may want to chat with Dan Kraus and Paul Ford, CEO and president of the new outfit **MyToons.com**. "This is the place where people who really love beautiful illustrations and animation can upload, view and share their creations, artwork and animated favorites with the entire world for free," says Ford. "MyToons.com is there for everyone, from seasoned industry pros to rabid fans—anyone can come in and join the fun."

Ford calls his site "a shiny new art and animation community" and it's easy to see why. It allows animators to share their latest projects with others and to create a cohesive community that offers support and visibility for their works all around the world. "We believe it's the community that makes the house rock and sets us apart," he adds. "Our superior-quality animation player,



sheer speed, user-generated content and the ability to share the art of animation with the world are some of the reasons we're excited about this venture."

Ford and Kraus will be at NAB to spread the word. "We feel that we're changing the playing field in the broadcast industry for animation," says Ford. Of course, there may be other fringe benefits in attending the NAB! "It would be nice to get a glimpse of the new iPhone!" he jokes.

For more info, visit [www.mytoons.com](http://www.mytoons.com).

## Eyeon Sees Double

Toronto's image-processing powerhouse **Eyeon** will be offering NAB attendees a taste of its two new products—**Rotation** and **Vision**.

Designed to work with eyeon Fusion for film production pipelines, Rotation specializes in rotoscoping, keying and retouching. According to the press notes, large departmentalized film facilities can now use this solution to create roto mattes, while retouched clean plates can be funneled to the senior compositing suites for finishing.



If you're looking for a versatile post-production system suited for the broadcasting industry, you'll want to take a look at Vision. An ideal addition to NLE's and post suites around the world, it offers comprehensive fields/frames and PAL/NTSC support and is resolution independent with 64 times the color fidelity of 10bit video. This makes it ideal for multiple HD and SD standards and formats. Vision's powerful motion graphics capabilities and extensive scripting engine allow for delivery of eye-popping packaging and promos. Multiple versatile color correctors, color grade matching tools, paint and retouching system, integrated tracking and image stabilization, Chroma keying and matte manipulation tools, warping and image manipulation tools, macro grouping for libraries of favorite looks and hundreds of third-party plug-ins make this package a real attractive one for broadcast clients.

For more info, visit [www.eyonline.com](http://www.eyonline.com) or visit them at NAB, Booth SL320. ■



# They Can Be Heroes!

Mark Kolpack discusses the challenges of creating dazzling vfx that don't distract viewers from the human elements in NBC's hit series, *Heroes*.

by Ron Magid

**W**hat if superheroes co-existed with us in our ordinary world? That's the premise of NBC's hugely popular weekly series *Heroes*, which neatly disposes of genre clichés in favor of real people blessed (or cursed) with extraordinary powers. Instead of just accepting their new life and throwing on a tacky spandex costume, these characters wrestle with the real power that has been thrust on them, and what they should do with it. "What grounds our series is the fact that it's really human," says visual effects supervisor Mark Kolpack (*Commander in Chief*). "The people who watch are like, 'Hey, that could be me.' That's what distinguishes *Heroes* from everything else."

It also makes the visual effects artists' work that much more challenging, especially on a show shot on film and finished in high-def, averaging 50 fx shots per weekly episode. To ground every effect in reality, Kolpack approached

the process from the point-of-view of each character: "An actor approaches a character in a certain way, so I tried to do that from this side of the craft. I looked for things that fit the

Kolpack says his team is always trying to pull back to a point to demonstrate how it all affects the characters emotionally at a specific instance. "If the effects stand out, that does a disservice to the characters, to the story and to the project," he explains. "So that's my bible in terms of how I approach the work: Make it as integrated as possible so it doesn't throw you off [with], 'Oh, nice shot—back to story.' That's how we separate ourselves from other comic-book projects that go for the big flashy vfx stuff."

Such character-driven vfx are mani-

"Everybody uses 'organic' as a catch-all phrase, but it doesn't really apply here. What we're talking about is what's aesthetically correct with the tone of the show—if someone's head is on backwards or someone has nuclear hands, there's nothing organic about that."

—Mark Kolpack, *Heroes*' vfx supervisor

character's life to show the genesis of [their power] and how it manifests. Everybody uses 'organic' as a catch-all phrase, but it doesn't really apply here. What we're talking about is what's aesthetically correct with the tone of the show—if someone's head is on backwards or someone has nuclear hands, there's nothing organic about that."

fest by *Heroes*' expanding cast of superhumans, mostly created via digital technology at Stargate Digital, a boutique fx house specializing in television—other shows include *Ugly Betty*, *Close to Home*, *Crossing Jordan*, *Monk*, *Raines* and the occasional feature, all at the same time. "Our pipeline is so fast, the 3D department creates elements using Maya, LightWave, Massive





Mark Kolpack

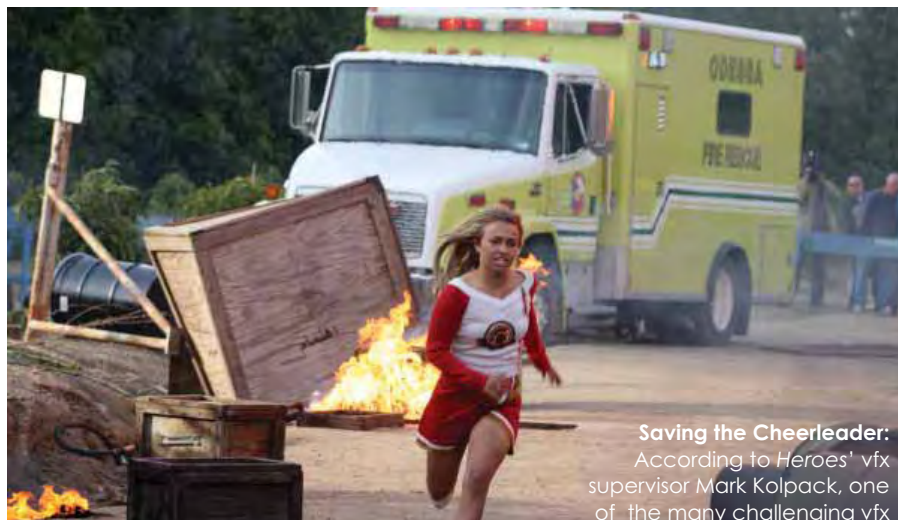
and RealFLO and renders them, while our compositors combine tons of 3D and photographic elements," Kolpack says. "We put out an average of 70 to 80 shots

a day."

They have to, especially given the high-wire act that is *Heroes*' fx. Among the most challenging sequences thus far involves nuclear man Ted Sprague (Matthew John Armstrong) emitting microwave radiation, torching the home of Claire Bennet (Hayden Panettiere), trapping the super-cheerleader and her family inside, facing certain death. Only Claire can get close enough to Ted to knock him out, but it will nearly destroy her. Can she regenerate?

An impressive—and potentially expensive—combination of practical and digital effects brought the sequence to spectacular life. "The producers ultimately want the approach that is best for the show," Kolpack explains. "So for this episode, we rebuilt the Bennet's kitchen completely burned, lit by Lightning Strikes and giant arc boxes gelled with CTO orange to give them a warm hue, plus practical fire and air movers shooting out particulate matter, all of which gave us texture to paint on top of. Then we lit Ted's hands to give us a bit of glow to enhance digitally and roto-scoped his fingers so as they become translucent we see the bones emitting nuclear rays and hot, sparking elements."

And that's just the beginning. "As Claire gets closer to Ted, the heat affects her skin, which starts to bubble and peel," Kolpack adds. "Special effects planned to use a couple of doubles in makeup to portray the burnt Claire coming out of the house. Well, we shot the doubles and it was fine: It looked like a burnt-up girl. Then Hayden stepped in front off the camera, I looked at the director, Allan Arkush, he



#### Saving the Cheerleader:

According to *Heroes*' vfx supervisor Mark Kolpack, one of the many challenging vfx sequences involve creating burns for cheerleader Claire (portrayed by Hayden Panettiere) and then animating her speedy healing scenarios.



looked at me, and we said, 'They don't match.' It's nothing against the doubles, but there's a reason Hayden is who she is—she's not just walking, she's thinking 25 things and doing 25 things as she's walking."

Arkush tried a few more takes, but ultimately, Kolpack persuaded him to let him approach the effect as he originally wanted to, using digital makeup. "We cyber-scanned Hayden's body and head, plus I shot additional texture maps of her using my Nikon D200. I got a bunch of really terrific beauty shots, plus other pics of her wearing a little charcoal and finally the ultimate special effects makeup, then I applied those to her 3D model. To be honest, both the head of 2D and the head of 3D said, 'I don't know—this is usually reserved for features, you don't do this on a television schedule,' but I just jumped in and persuaded them. Sometimes the supervisor's role is to have a poker face, but I had enough belief in the talent that it was a calculated, not a foolish risk."

When the shots came in, Kolpack's team literally had eight-and-a-half

days to finish this sequence and a total of 117 shots in the episode. "We had to track the camera move and Claire, then light, animate and composite her 3D likeness over her body so when she burned up, then heals, she went from crispy Claire to completely restored," Kolpack says. "After her skin bubbles, her face and hands burn away. We cut outside as the house blows apart, everyone thinks she's dead, and then she steps out through the smoke, and as she's walking, her upper torso's regenerating. Her entire camera left arm was charred, her chest and her face. But all we shot was Hayden at her end point: her hair and face darkened from soot. And she just walks and we tracked the camera, we tracked her body, and we roto-animated her charred form healing in a single steady-cam shot. We didn't want to cut away, we wanted something that said, 'Look Ma, no hands!'"

While Claire burning and Claire healing was "probably the most challenging effect to date, there's always new heroes, there's always new creative challenges to solve, so it changes, it's not a stagnant world, it's an evolving one," Kolpack concludes. "It's just an effects supervisor's kid-in-a-candy-store dream." ■

**Heroes returns to the NBC lineup on Monday April 23 at 9 p.m.**

# iQue Diabolito!

Spain's Furia Digital brings a mischievous Spanish goblin to digital life. *by Barbara Robertson*

Legend has it that if you catch a *duende*, you'll be happy—but if you don't, you'll also be happy. So it goes with this mythological Spanish goblin.

And that's why, when the ONCE organization (Organización Nacional de Ciegos Españoles) wanted to promote its new scratch-and-win lottery tickets, the production company Tesauero, (Madrid and Barcelona) and the Delvico Madrid agency hired director Carl Erik Rinsch of RSA Films and Furia Digital (Barcelona) to feature a little *duende* in a television spot. It was a huge success.

"The idea behind the spot is that everyone chases the little creatures that are set free in the street," says Rinsch. "They're representations of prizes, money, opportunity. Every once in a while someone grabs one, but even if they don't, they have fun." At the end of the commercial, you see hundreds of *duendes* pouring out of a lottery booth kiosk.

"They wanted to sell five million tickets in the first three months," Rinsch says. "They ran out in eight days."

Rinsch worked with the agency and with Furia to design the *duende*. "At the beginning, they were modern, like Japanese toys," says Alex Grau, Furia founder. "The agency wanted something softer and Carl wanted something edgier. So, they discussed all those things. At the end we had only three days, so we designed it in 3D instead of making drawings, which is the opposite of what we normally do." No one, of course, had seen a *duende*.

"It's a goblin, but it's also a spirit," says Rinsch. "In the Spanish culture, it's indefinable. I talked to the client at ONCE on the phone to get feedback."

The creature they agreed on is the

size of a small teddy bear, has a big head and big eyes, a broad sneaky grin and pointed ears on the sides of its head. It looks like they made it out of a bath towel. Cute, but not cuddly. It wears a jingle bell around its neck—you can hear the rascal as well as see it.

"ONCE is a private lottery that benefits blind and handicapped people," says Rinsch, "So in Spain, if you're blind, you're guaranteed an education, health care and a job. Every employee in the company is blind or handi-

city street. The *duende* dares the man with a catch-me-if-you-can look. In the next shot, we see dozens of the small creatures scamper through a crowd of people. The *duendes* are everywhere, running, bouncing up stairs, leaping in the air, climbing onto the balconies of an apartment building. Some people try to grab them; others ignore them. One *duende* squeezes through the doors of a subway and steps on a woman's foot. A man carries another through an intersection. A *duende* sits on the windowsill of a woman's apartment. Another wreaks havoc in a cafeteria.

"It was a crazy shoot," says Furia's Grau. "We went to 10 locations in three days. Carl moves the camera a lot, so I took measurements for everything. He's panning, zooming and running with the camera on his shoulder like he's running after the little goblins."



"The idea was to take a 3D character, try to have it be tactile, and then have it move less like traditional 3D characters and more like stop-motion characters."

—Carl Eric Rinsch, director of the ONCE "El Rasca" spot.

capped. That meant my client, the creative director for marketing and advertising, is blind. At first, because I was talking to him on the phone, I didn't know I was directing a commercial for someone who is blind."

The commercial begins with a businessman chasing a *duende* down a

Grau estimates that the studio tracked about half the shots by building geometry in Maya, including the entire cafeteria, and hand-tracking the camera. "Some shots were impossible to track even with any of the latest software," he says.

On location, Furia gave the actors



who caught a duende tiny blue pillows to hold; the pillow had tracking points to help CG artists trade them for the character later—the duende is always digital in the spot.

"We had a duende prop in the right scale that we shot for lighting reference," says Grau. "And, I took pictures of chrome balls at different f-stops for HDRI images. Because we had a short schedule, in many shots, we added only some main lights and fill lights and that was it. But, in the cafeteria we replicated every light with CG lights." The studio accomplished the entire post-production in two weeks.

While Rinsch shot the actors, the six-person Furia crew worked on preproduction for the character and developed the animation style. The studio uses Maya and 3ds Max, V-Ray and Mental Ray for rendering, and for compositing, Combustion, Shake and Flame.

"For textures, we took a picture of a towel and created displacement maps from that picture," Grau says. "We did tests with fur, but the director preferred the towel texture." In addition, the crew created walking, running and jumping textures for Rinsch.

"The idea was to take a 3D character, try to have it be tactile, and then have it move less like traditional 3D characters and more like stop-motion characters," says Rinsch. "I wanted people to wonder if this is stop-motion, or animatronics in close-ups or what? And how the hell did they do it?"

How Furia did it was by developing a shot-dependent animation style. They emulated stop-motion in close-ups by posing the character on every fourth frame, with nothing changing between



these keyframes. Then, they used keyframe animation with some change in motion in every frame when the duende runs. "Because we have a live-action background, when they're running up and down we went for the flow of classical animation," Grau says. "Stop-motion over live-action 25 fps [PAL] looks weird." They added motion blur in compositing to the standard keyframe animation.

It was up to the animators to give the character its rascally personality. "We played a lot with his eyelids to show it was happy, but not super happy," Grau says. "When the people try to catch them and can't, they smile in a mean way. They never smile with their mouth wide open."

ONCE's creative director participated in the editing and animation process. "I would take the creative direc-

tor's hand and trace every frame, and say things like, 'The little rascal is here, and over here is a lady looking down at her feet,'" Rinsch says. "The blind executives are so bright. They had opinions about the shots and they were 100 percent right. I've worked with clients who get scared because 3D animation is something that's not fully realized until the very end, and because they can't see it, they panic. They have no faith in the process. But with the ONCE executives, because they're blind, their capacity to see in their mind's eye was extraordinary."

Rinsch describes a remarkable moment during this process: "I was tracing this person's finger on the screen and describing the rascal's ex-

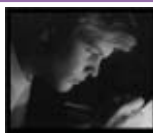
pression. He asked, 'Oh, like this?' and he made that expression. I said, 'Yeah, exactly like that.' 'Oh,' he said, 'that's great. I love that shot.' I'm a 6'2" tough guy who wears cowboy boots and I've never cried with a client, but I actually cried showing this commercial to this client. Not because I felt sorry for them in any way, shape or form, but because they gave me so much faith. I was able to be their eyes. It was such a pleasure." ■

**Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in visual effects and CG technology. If you have any suggestions for her columns, you can e-mail her at [barbararr@comcast.net](mailto:barbararr@comcast.net).**

**You can see the director's cut of the ONCE ad on Stash DVD Issue No. 29 [February]. For more info, visit <http://furia-digital.com>.**

# Tech Reviews

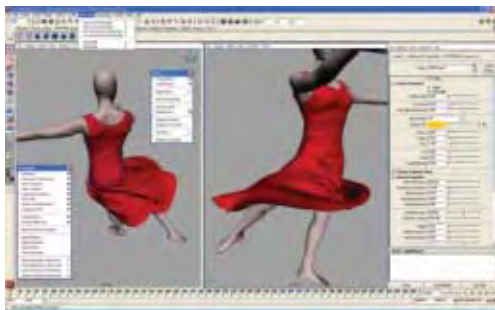
by Todd Sheridan Perry



## Autodesk Maya 8.5

A few months ago, we reviewed the 8.0 version of Maya in this column. However, Autodesk decided to do a point release of the popular software in the beginning of 2007 (bringing the number up to 8.5). I started to look at this new version and thought that this point version is actually more substantial than the full upgrade when it climbed to 8.0! Because of its spunkin' new features, the product certainly warranted an additional review.

So you've heard me before going on and on about how important scripting is to a software's position in a production pipeline. More structured than MAXScript, but less powerful than C++, MELScript isn't too shabby and has been treating scripheads well for many years. The folks at Autodesk decided that it would be a good idea to spice up the dish by adding a dash of Python. Python has evidently taken over the visual effects industry as the language of choice for tool development, followed closely by Perl. Both XSI and Boujou use it as their scripting language. It seems to me to be a good choice. Its incorporation comes with a new Script window interface with buffers for both MEL and Python.



Additional tabs can be added for both languages so if you are testing different executables, you aren't limited to the one buffer.

The second major advancement is really a preview into a new technology being developed called Nucleus. The basis of Nucleus stems from technology developed by Jos Stam and introduced in a SIGGRAPH paper back in 2002. Some have been touting it as the next generation of dynamic simulations. nCloth within Maya 8.5 is the first practical utilization of Nucleus with more to come in later versions.

nCloth uses a system of particles with links between the particles that act as forces holding the fabric together. The solver system incorporates the cloth, passive objects, and constraints (similar to most other cloth simulation systems). The difference with Nucleus is that it calculates in an iterative process where the solution

becomes more stable and accurate after each iteration. This approach also allows the simulation to recover after a failure by iterating from the point of failure and continuing with the sim. The result is a much more stable dynamic system. The cloth is controllable through caching the simulations and utilizing the caches as targets to blend between one another through the Trax editor.

On top of these features, the solver allows for bi-directional influences between cloth and forces. I can't tell you how many times I've run into a situation where numerous pieces of cloth are pulling on each other and the sim fails or calculates improperly. I can't wait to see the next set of applications using Nucleus. A final note on this is that nCloth is only available in Maya Unlimited.

New polygon modeling tools have been added in an attempt to catch up with the tool already implemented in Max and Mojo. In the same vein, UV tools have been expanded as well, most notably the ability to transfer UV from models that have different poly counts. So, you can setup UVs on a low-poly version of a character and then transfer those to a high-rez version, or vice versa.

Other advances include tools to blend cache files within the Trax editor, as mentioned above in the nCloth section. The architectural Mental Ray shader has been added for further realism and brings it on par with Mental Ray in Max. Mental Ray is expanded to utilize 16 processors for those with 64-bit systems for Windows or Linux boxes.

There are more minor advancements, but the biggies are certainly the addition of Python and the incorporation of Nucleus. As I said earlier, I feel these are worthy of a full-version upgrade. But, what do I know?

**Website:** <http://usa.autodesk.com>

**Price:** \$1,999 (Maya Complete 8.5); \$899 (Upgrade); \$6,999 (Maya Unlimited 8.5); \$1,249 (Upgrade).

## D2 Software's NUKE

Earlier last year, Apple announced that it was going to kill Shake, the industry's leading compositing tools, which it had purchased a scant few years previous. After considering all the alternatives, I'm thinking that the major contender for the Shake throne is NUKE, developed by D2 Software (sister company, or perhaps daughter, of visual effects house Digital Domain). Now that NUKE's Version 4.6 is finally here and the company is preparing to preview a new version at SIGGRAPH 2007 in San Diego, you might ask, what is so good about it? Well ... much more than I can fit in this review. In light of

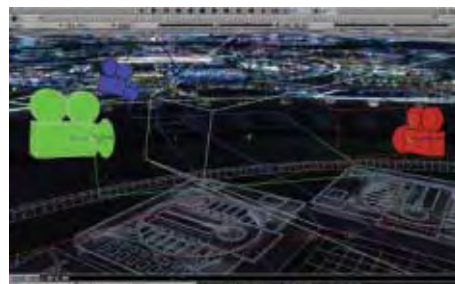
that, let's focus on the big stuff.

NUKE makes full utilization of ILM's OpenEXR format. Not only does it use 32-bit float data provided in the format, but it takes advantage of the extras channels beyond RGBA—64 channels to be exact. Clever TDs can shove a mountain of data into those channels—Zdepth, Diffuse, Specular, Reflections, Refractions, Subsurface Scattering and a partridge in a pear tree for Christmas-themed movies. Basically, all the data you need in a render can be stored in the EXR channels, and NUKE can access it, alleviating the need for tons of individual passes. Each of the channels are accessible at any point in the flow.

Usually, you won't have all the channels used in the rendered elements, which just leaves more room for you, as the compositor, to store additional information generated in the flow. Rotomattes, Primatte keys (bundled with Nuke), lumamattes, etc can be created and then injected into the flow into one of the channels. The element can then be retrieved at any point downstream without having to repipe it back in. It's simply called through a dropdown menu in the tool you want limited by the matte.

NUKE also works in a 3D environment. Alone, not cutting edge on the surface. After Effects, Combustion, and Fusion all have 3D support. However, NUKE bumps up the bar by supporting OBJ importing with UV preservation and has projection mapping capabilities, which can take a lot of burden off the 3D department by being able to create environment extension and matte paintings in the composite.

With the release of 4.6, new goodies are coming your way. Optiflow patterntracks pixels in a sequence of images to create or remove motion blur. The already top-notch tracker has been made more accurate and faster. InPaint samples pixels adjacent to scratches and wires to wipe out the blemishes. As mentioned above, Nuke is bundled with the newest Primatte working in 32-



bit float precision. HDRI and CRW files are supported so compositors have the widest color and lighting latitude. Truelight is bundled which provides accurate color management when going to film or HD. And finally, as a nice additional tidbit, IRIDAS joined with D2 to put in Framecycler Professional as the uncompressed playback tool. And let's not forget that it uses TCL as its

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Pulcinella Awards

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scripting language to customize the user program to taste.

All of these features—and availability on all three primary operating systems. The downside is that the UI is so bare that it may frighten compositors with weak constitutions. It takes a bit more time to get into it than other compositing tools, but underneath the bare exterior is a whole lot of power for those brave enough to dive in. It costs much more than After Effects and Combustion, but is comparable to Fusion and what Shake used to be, and way less than a Flame or Inferno. I think the main contenders to watch now are Fusion and Nuke. I won't throw out Autodesk's Toxik just yet, but I have not seen enough to allow it to toss its hat in the circle.

Website: [www.d2software.com](http://www.d2software.com)

### Luxology's modo 203

Last month, Luxology released a point upgrade for its modeling program modo, bringing it up to 203. The software has already established itself as a powerful modeling tool, especially for poly modeling popular for characters and other organic forms. Most of the new advances are focused in the UV layout tools to unwrap the texture coordinates. UV texturing is a task that I never look forward to, so I welcome any tools that

promise to make the job easier. Move and sew tools have been updated to simplify aligning and joining UV polys that have been separated in automated UV processes. UV Relax can now be used adaptively to reduce distortion in the projection. I also noticed that UV wrapping worked better and faster along with sealing holes and pinning.

Luxology has made numerous refinements under the



Rendered by modo 203 by  
Andy Brown.

hood to make the whole program run more efficiently and faster, with memory management improved to handle high poly counts and more and larger texture maps. Raytracing has been substantially improved, increasing the render speeds from the previous version by 1.4 times. Both rendering and GI calculations benefit from this increase. Although I personally wouldn't choose modo as my primary rendering tool for production, it's certainly beneficial for rendering

turntables to analyze the model.

Finally, modo 203 adds DXF support for ASCII DXF files. In visual effects and CG work, I have not come across a DXF file in over a decade, but for manufacturing and architecture, DXFs are prevalent, as they are widely used in Autodesk software. I presume that since AutoCAD users outnumber us visual effects artists in a scrap, the addition of DXF support will help spread the modo package in wider circles.

Overall, I believe that modo is an incredibly powerful modeling tool. The additions and refinements have just made it more so. Sometimes it is hard to gauge the importance of changes in a minor point upgrade, but these small changes allow the artists to acclimate a little better than when a full upgrade changes things dramatically.

Website: [www.luxology.com](http://www.luxology.com)

Price: \$395 upgrade for modo 202 owners; \$895 for new users; a free 30-day trial is

available from website.

### NextComputing's Flextop Series

In a world where laptops are becoming more powerful and more predominant and towers are too big and bulky, there is a definite niche that needs to be filled.

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TELEVISIÓ DE CATALUNYA



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People like on-set visual effects supervisors for films and researchers and scientists processing large amounts of data in the field need robust systems with lots of CPU power and lots of storage—amounts that may go beyond the capability of even the most powerful laptops. Let's face it: You can only stick so much into one-inch-high boxes, and the more you shove into a small space, the hotter the components will get.

The good news is that NextComputing has created a series of boxes that satisfy this growing niche. Depending on your specific needs, they have a Flextop series for a portable solution of high-end graphics and editing. The Vigor series puts the workstation into a strong metal chassis for protection from hostile environments like industrial plants and mills, military field operations, and most hostile of all, a film set. NextComputing also has a blade server for compacting up to 32 processors in a 4u rack mount setup.

For this review, I was sent a Flextop for a drive around the block. [Flextops are available in four categories: NextDimension Pro, NextDimension Pro HD, NextDimension Evo and Next Dimension Evo HD.] I requested a Windows 64-bit system with 8GB of RAM (which could have capped at 16GB) and an Nvidia QuadroFX3500 with 256MB of RAM. I would have like more video RAM and a 5500, but the performance of



the box provided proved that the higher-end card was unnecessary.

The CPUs are two dual-core Opteron AMD64s. The box is a sleek, silver 6" x 12" x 16" suitcase with a 17" LCD monitor built into the side. No airline will stop you from bringing it onboard as a carry-on. A handle on the top make for easy transportation, plus it comes with a soft bag, fitting the workstation and the addition components like keyboard and mouse. Since the weighs around 17 lbs, it certainly won't do a number on your back. Hidden away under removable panels are 4 USB2 ports, Gigabit port, and two ports for connecting external SATA drives.

I was able to load on 64-bit versions of 3DS Max and Maya to run the system through the paces. I didn't find any hitches in the performance, even with high poly counts or high-demand calculations like fluids or final gather solutions in Mental Ray. But, with the amount of power under the hood, I didn't suspect I would. I fact,

my little FlexTop out-performed all of the workstations at the facility with which I'm currently working. The company's vfx supervisor wanted to take the system with him to Louisiana for onset supervision so he could use it for realtime tracking and composite tests. I wasn't going to let the system out of my sight, however—least of all letting it go to a rural town in Louisiana. But if I had gone to set, I not only could have handled the 3D side of things, but I could have been editing at HD quality with the addition of certified Blackmagic, AJA, or Bluefish444 cards as well as a second or third external HD monitor.

Anything I threw at it, the Flextop knocked it out of the park and it really impressed me with how much power it held in its tiny framework. The cost is somewhat prohibitive for hobbyists or home use. At \$15K, you are looking at a hefty front-end investment, but for industries requiring this kind of power out in the field, the cost will start to offset itself when you take into consideration the cost of shipping a full workstation to remote locations around the globe. The hardware is made of all open-standards COTS components, so upgrading does not require expensive proprietary hardware—also keeping future costs down. And, as a mild benefit, the procs run at 55w rather than 95w, dropping the electricity expenditure and prolonging the life of the CPUs.

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# Digital Magic

by Christopher Grove



## Broadband Moves to Pop Culture Front and Center

Thanks, in part, to the increasing number of U.S. households with broadband access (54.5 million broadband lines in U.S. homes with 84 million users by mid-2006, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project) watching and downloading content online has become a credible experience for a mass audience. And now that YouTube, and all that implies, has become a motif of mainstream media culture, the 1990s' predictions of the death of broadcast TV (at least as we knew it as recently as 10 years ago) now look more prescient than puffery. Seemingly everybody—from Super Bowl advertisers to Al Gore's lefty Current TV (current.tv) are not only jumping on the bandwagon they're making a go of it.

In mid-March, for example, MTV, Yahoo! Movies and reality TV king **Mark Burnett Productions** announced a plan to "enhance" the experience by letting fans compete for a best movie spoof award at the **2007 MTV Movie Awards** award. The winner will get to accept their prize on the live TV show, June 3, 2007. "(The) competition breaks new ground in changing the way we discover talent, giving amateur movie makers an opportunity to walk away with the Golden Popcorn," says Vince Broady, head of entertainment for Yahoo!. "The ability to create and interact with user-generated content is so important to today's audience that this show simply had to include it as a major element," Burnett adds. During the 2006 version of the awards, MTV delivered over 2 million streams, up over 50 percent from the

year before. For its part, [mtv.com](http://mtv.com) logged a record 84 million streams in January and 85.1 million in February, up 228 percent over last year. "Viewers are constantly telling us they want to dig deeper into the content they see on-air," says Christina Norman, president of MTV.

Also in March, a former tormentor of traditional media, **BitTorrent**, announced it was essentially going into business with the major studios on content distribution. Working slightly differently than iTunes and Microsoft's Xbox Live service, BitTorrent will mix free downloads of users' own video up-

came TheirTube faster than you can say "2006." I think I'll go watch a DVD on my old-school TV.

### Short Bytes

>>>>One of the obsessions in creating and rendering photo-real people and animals is hair and fur, the appearance and movement of which is one of the hardest things for an animator to achieve. **NVIDIA** has just added a new solution into the mix with the release of **Gelato 2.1**, a high-quality, GPU-accelerated rendering software that includes support for Joe Alter's *Shave* and a *Haircut* software. Other en-

hancements in this newest release of Gelato include support for Autodesk Maya 8.5 and 3ds Max 9.0, improved stereo rendering, fog lights and significant performance improvements.

"Maya users can easily add Gelato to their rendering pipelines to achieve extremely realistic hair and fur. It's a potent rendering solution for them," says Joe Alter, CEO Joe Alter, Inc. Gelato 2.1 is available as a free download at

[www.nvidia.com/gelato](http://www.nvidia.com/gelato). Gelato Pro 2.1, priced at \$1,500, offers advanced rendering features and greater scalability for professional production pipelines.

>>>>Probably the biggest groups of fans who win anytime a large-screen format comes to town are fans of animation and visual effects movies. Just ask the *Star Wars* crowd who viewed the most recent trilogy on an **IMAX** screen. Though the big-screen business has not expanded as quickly as Imax executives predicted ten years ago it continues to move forward. IMAX's



NVIDIA Gelato  
(sample UA from  
website)

loads and sales of shows such as *24* and *Bones* for \$1.99 an episode. It will also rent movies. Once downloaded, they "expire" within 30 days of purchase or 24 hours after the buyer begins to watch.

But lest we make any hard predictions about exactly when we can say TV will flatline, we'll do well to heed what John Brockman (publisher and editor of [edge.org](http://edge.org)) told the *L.A. Times* recently: "...YouTube/MySpace/Napster didn't change the real world for most people very much. MySpace became TheirSpace and YouTube be-



2007 film slate already includes three of the year's most anticipated releases: *300: The IMAX Experience* (released March 9), *Spider-Man 3: The IMAX Experience* (which opens May 4th) and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: The IMAX Experience* (which opens July 13). And there'll be at least five more screens to see those films on. Imax and Kansas-based Dickinson Theatres Inc. are opening five IMAX theatres in new multiplexes in Mesa, Arizona, Little Rock, Arkansas, Springfield, Missouri and Wichita, Kansas. A fifth location will be announced later. "Moviegoers are paying a premium to see Hollywood movies in IMAX's format, and with more major studio releases coming each year, we felt now was the right time to enter the IMAX theatre business," says John Hartley, CEO of Dickinson Theatres.

All of the theatres will utilize IMAX MPX technology, designed specifically to enable multiplex operators to get



enter into the IMAX theatre business, either by retrofitting an existing stadium-seating auditorium or via an economical new build.

>>>>Manchester, England-based **HOT Animation** has just completed an important piece of third-party work on the return of the BBC hit series, *Life on Mars*. HOT produced a one-minute opening sequence that uses stop-frame animation of replicas of the two lead characters in the show. "I think it's one of the most beautiful, hilarious and satisfying things we've done on the

show, and that's due to a brilliant job by HOT Animation," says Matthew Graham, the series' creator, writer and executive producer.

Launched in 1997, HOT Animation is a wholly owned subsidiary of HIT Entertainment. HOT specializes in stop-frame model animation and boasts six fully equipped animation studios, as well as an art department, four prop workshops, set workshop, costume department, four offline edit suites, foley suite and sound suite. *Angelina Ballerina*, *Bob the Builder*, *Fireman Sam* and *Fraggle Rock* are some of HIT Entertainment's most popular shows. Among the toons in production at the studio this year are new seasons of *Thomas and Friends* and *Pingu*. ■

**Chris Grove is Los Angeles-based journalist and actor who specializes in new media and vfx. If you have any hot tips for his column, please e-mail him at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net)**

## Director of the Program in Character Animation at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)

CalArts seeks a visionary program director with a distinguished artistic background and collaborative leadership skills to head its BFA Program in Character Animation within the School of Film/Video. The Program is recognized as one of the foremost college educational centers for animation in the United States and has graduated such noted alums as John Lasseter and Brad Bird. The Program Director will be responsible for nurturing, developing and working in collaboration with a fulltime faculty equivalent of 12 and a student population of 160. Candidates for the position should have demonstrated artistic achievement (at a level commensurate with a senior position); a solid background in management principles and responsible fiscal management; and passion for student learning within the context of a diverse art school environment. For a full job description, please visit [www.calarts.edu](http://www.calarts.edu). Review of applications will begin immediately, and the position will remain open until filled, with an expected starting date of fall 2007. Candidates should send a cover letter, CV, work sample and the names / contact information for three references to Nancy Uscher, Provost, CalArts, 24700 McBean Parkway, Valencia, CA 91355. EOE.

# CALARTS





## Playing the Numbers Game

Art Institute's Beau Janzen's geometry-inspired project, *Mesh*, adds up. **by Ellen Wolff**

In an iterative art form like animation, math concepts play a key role. That's particularly true in the algorithmic world of computer animation, so it's fitting that CG is being used to visualize mathematics in an entertaining way. At the Art Institute of Los Angeles, teacher Beau Janzen harnesses his CG skills—honed on *X-Men* movies—to bring math concepts to animated life. To help students 'see' the ideas behind equations, Janzen has also created a collection of visualization videos, including the award-winning *Mesh*.

Voted Best Animation at New York's Independent Film & Video Festival, *Mesh* is designed to be a 'journey' through discrete geometry. It uses the patterns of mosaic tiles, the elegant simplicity of blueprints and the shimmering surfaces of soap bubbles to illuminate geometric principles. Janzen also employs simple character animation to bring humor into these lessons. Although he designed it with education in mind, he explains, "My feeling is that it should hold up as pure animation. Some people try to sugar-coat education



Beau Janzen

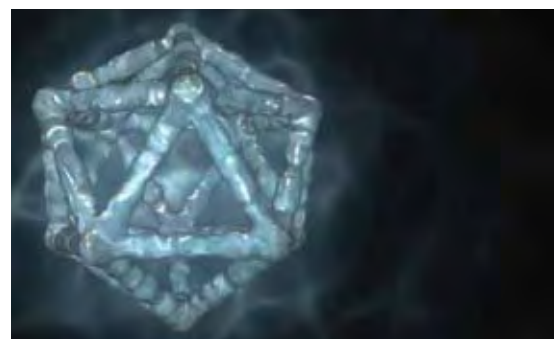
as 'info-tainment,' but adding the 'tainment' implies there is something bitter about the 'info' part."

By explaining abstract concepts through animation, *Mesh* demonstrates that a picture really can be worth a thousand words. "Visualizations should illustrate the invisible, not merely mimic observable reality," says Janzen, who teaches 3D animation at the Art Institute in addition to math. "The idea is to see patterns around you. There's a harmony in how things come together—a clockwork of ideas. Through visualizations, those patterns are much more apparent."

During his six years on the Art Institute's Media Arts & Animation faculty, Janzen has taught his share of students who have 'math phobia.' But while he teaches what he calls "math for creative people," Janzen says, "I am not thinking: 'Oh, you're an animator. Here's how you will use math.'"

Using visualization as a teaching tool for artists, however, confirms his belief that math can be taught by means other than abstract equations. Janzen thinks that equations are to math what sheet music is to a musical performance, and that you can depict the relationships that a formula quantifies. "When I give tests, some students ask: 'Do I have to write it out, or can I draw it?' Even if they draw a graphic novel, that

continued on page 82





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Opportunities  
continued from page 80

shows they've mastered an idea."

Belief in the value of visualization as a teaching tool is what led Janzen to spend two-and-a-half years animating *Mesh*. While he collaborated with Berlin-based math professor Dr. Konrad Polthier on the script, Janzen did all the animation alone. The production was a far cry from the high-end images he created when he worked at Kleiser-Wakzack Studios—animation that included two *X-Men* features, Philip Glass' *Monsters Of Grace* theatrical project and the *Spider-Man* stereoscopic ride film. Yet Janzen still employed

Maya, Photoshop and After Effects to create the animation in *Mesh*. "It was 40 minutes of CG by one person and one PC!"

While *Mesh* has been shown to audiences both here and abroad, it has also been useful in Janzen's classrooms. "I show it in geometry class, because it ties together a lot of

friendly software, he observes, "Makes the 'numbers part' of CG more invisible. The more primitive software I grew up with required some thought to use it. Now, there is more of a tendency to think 'Why bother modeling well? I can use Z-brush to fix it.' Quite often, there's a momentum to let the software take

"Quite often, there's a momentum to let the software take care of your problems. I don't think that animators have to become number-crunchers, but it is important to grasp the ideas behind the numbers."

— Beau Janzen, director of *Mesh* and teacher at the OArt Institute of Los Angeles

concepts. But I've also used it in my computer animation classes to teach concepts like sub-division surfaces, and technical things like rigging, too."

Janzen views the importance of learning math concepts in a broad perspective, especially for computer animators. Today's increasingly user-

care of your problems. I don't think that animators have to become number-crunchers, but it is important to grasp the ideas behind the numbers.

Surprisingly, Janzen admits that when he was in school, math was his least favorite subject. "I think it's the most misunderstood subject—I know

that I misunderstood it." But now, using *Mesh* and his previous videos, *The Shadows of Alexandria*, *The Inverse Square Law* and *Fibonacci and the Golden Mean*, he's found a way to clarify misunderstandings. "I've found that students who say 'I'm really bad at math' do best in my class. Once they see the subject in a visual way, they get it."

They also get a new appreciation for the power of animation to reveal invisible relationships. "I encourage my students to see beyond the sparkle and the flash to the raw power of this medium, which has yet to be tapped. ■

**Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, animation and education. If you have school-related story ideas for her, please e-mail her at [edit@animationmagazine.net](mailto:edit@animationmagazine.net).**

**Information about the *Mesh* DVD, which is published by Springer, can be found at Zipheron Design Labs website, [www.zipheron.com](http://www.zipheron.com).**







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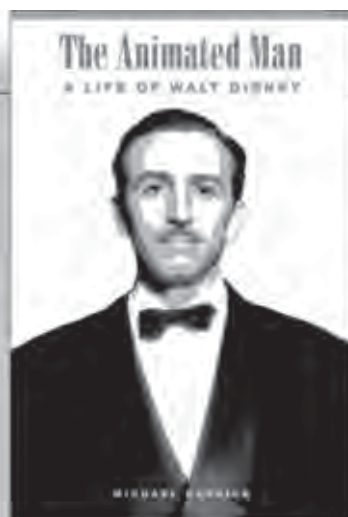


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onedotzero	April 25-May 5	Paris, France	<a href="http://www.onedotzero.com">www.onedotzero.com</a>
Tribeca Film Festival	April 25-May 6	New York, NY	<a href="http://www.tribecafilmfestival.org">www.tribecafilmfestival.org</a>
San Francisco Int'l Film Festival	April 26-May 10	San Francisco, CA	<a href="http://www.sffs.org">www.sffs.org</a>
Pittsburgh ComiCon	April 27-29	Pittsburgh, PA	<a href="http://www.pittsburghcomicon.com">www.pittsburghcomicon.com</a>
fmX/06	May 1-4	Stuttgart, Germany	<a href="http://www.fmx.de">www.fmx.de</a>
Int'l Short Film Festival Oberhausen	May 3-8	Germany	<a href="http://www.kurzfilmtage.de">www.kurzfilmtage.de</a>
AniFest 2007	May 3-9	Trebon, Czech Republic	<a href="http://www.anifest.cz">www.anifest.cz</a>
Digital Video Expo East	May 4-6	New York, NY	<a href="http://www.dvexpo.com">www.dvexpo.com</a>
122nd AES Convention	May 5-8	Vienna, Austria	<a href="http://www.aes.org">www.aes.org</a>
LepreCon 33	May 11-13	Phoenix, AZ	<a href="http://www.leprecon.org">www.leprecon.org</a>
Licensing In India	May 14-16	Bangalore, India	<a href="http://www.licensinginindia.com">www.licensinginindia.com</a>
Kalamazoo Animation Festival Int'l	May 17-20	Kalamazoo, MI	<a href="http://kafi.kvcc.edu">http://kafi.kvcc.edu</a>
Cannes Film Festival	May 16-27	Cannes, France	<a href="http://www.festival-cannes.org/cinefondation">www.festival-cannes.org/cinefondation</a>
Kid Power	May 20-24	Lake Buena Vista, FL	<a href="http://www.kidpowerx.com">www.kidpowerx.com</a>
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**Greg Lynn**, exec producer and managing director of **Chapman Entertainment** (*Fifi and the Flowertots*, *Roary the Racing Car*) feels like he needs to cram a year in any one day of his life. It's his 50th birthday after all and he needs to share the festivities with all our readers. He writes, "Today is as busy as any other, and once I've opened my pressies, I'm needed at my office on the river in Putney, our animation studio in Manchester and at a celebration lunch in London with my staff and in Paris and Washington D.C. I did it all by hiring the Concorde, which they brought out of retirement especially for me!"



I arrive at 5 a.m. on my trusty company vehicle at the office.



I get to Paris for a licensee meeting at 10 a.m., but Fifi insists on seeing the sights first.



We arrive in New York in a snow storm and nearly lost Fifi in a snow drift.



I rush back to London for lunch at Zuma, yummy, with everybody. We are overwhelmed with women and are trying to persuade some to have sex changes to even the balance. No takers so far.



Up to Washington D.C. to discuss *Fifi* with a broadcaster.



Regular sunrise meeting with my two partners Keith and Andrew. Andrew is the handsome one.



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regarding the terms and conditions of my employment. If the union obtains an agreement with my employer, I understand that I am free to negotiate more desirable terms on an individual basis. I understand that when the majority of employees authorize union representation, recognition from my employer may be obtained without an election.

X \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please sign here) (Today's date)

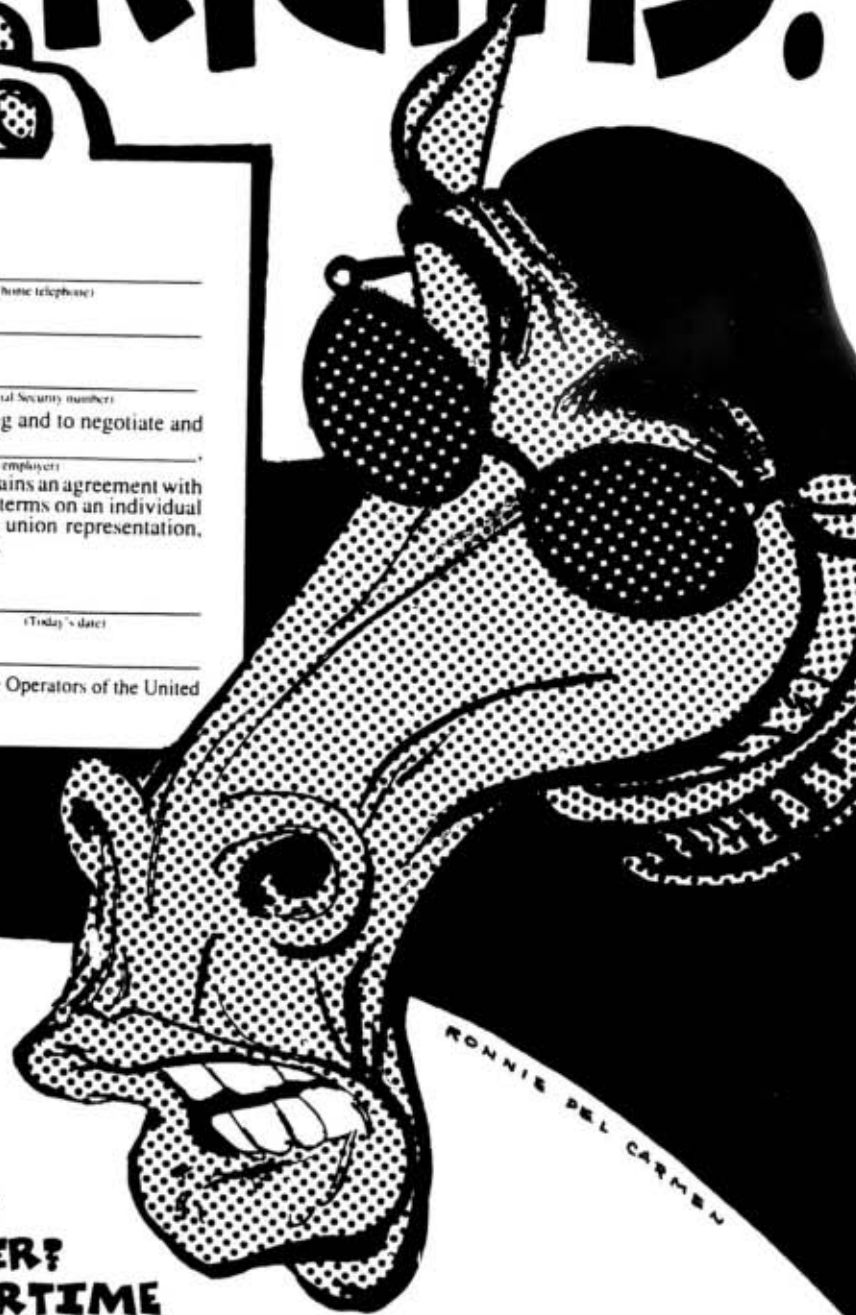
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\*International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Machine Operators of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO

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